

**THE RELIGIOUS STRUCTURE OF NAJRĀN IN LATE PRE-ISLAMIC AND  
EARLY ISLAMIC HISTORY: FROM THE END OF THE *HIMYARITE*  
*KINGDOM* UNTIL THE END OF THE RASHIDUN CALIPHATE (525-661 CE)**

By

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## **Abstract**

This thesis questions what was the religious structure of the region of Najrān was during the period between 525 and 661 CE by examining the factors of forming the religious structure, how each religious community practised its religious life and the influence of Islam on this religious structure.

It therefore consists of six chapters, Chapter one contains a discussion on primary and secondary sources relevant to the research questions. In Chapter two, the background on Najrān is given, in terms of its geography, demography, economy and political history prior to the period under research.

The following three chapters after that investigate the religious aspects of polytheism, Judaism and Christianity in terms of origins, types of worship, rituals of worship and theological beliefs. The discussions also shed light on their religious leaders, places of worship and doctrinal sects.

In Chapter six, the study debates how Islam influenced the religious structure of Najrān, by tracing its arrival and the policy of Muslim authorities to spread Islam among the Najrānite people. The thesis discusses the main features of the policy of the Muslim authority towards non-Muslims in terms of religion, security, economy and citizenship. It finally evaluates the impact of this policy on the lives of non-Muslim Najrānites.

The thesis concludes that Najrān seems to represent a multi-religious society during the period under research. It points out that geographical, economic and political factors contributed towards making it. The thesis also deduces that each religious community established its identity which developed over the course of time to include places of worship, clergy, types of deity, doctrines, theological beliefs and rituals of worship, and that the domination of Islam clearly made the most important change in this multi-religious society by making Muslims the majority in the region.

## **Dedication**

To the memory of the two best people who share the name ‘Abdullah bin Sa‘d: my dear FATHER, ‘Abdullah bin Sa‘d bin Nāḥī, my first and best teacher in this life, who taught me the values of manhood, honesty and struggle.

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– may Allah have mercy on them-

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## Transliteration

### Library of Congress Arabic Transliteration System

ء	‘	ض	ḍ
ب	b	ط	ṭ
ت	t	ظ	ẓ
ث	th	ع	‘
ج	J	غ	gh
ح	ḥ	ف	f
خ	kh	ق	q
د	d	ك	k
ذ	dh	ل	l
ر	r	م	m
ز	z	ن	n
س	s	هـ	h
ش	sh	و	w
ص	ṣ	ي	y

## Vowels

Long		Short	
ا	ā	َ	a
ي	ī	ِ	i
و	ū	ُ	U

## Abbreviations

AH	Muslim Hijrī calendar
CE	The Common Era calendar or the Gregorian calendar
BCE	Before Common Era
d.	died
ed.	edition
n.d.	no date
Transl.	Translator
Vol.	Volume
P	page
PP	pages
et al.	and other authors or editors

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## Glossary

*‘Abd*: Servant

*Aḥbār*: Rabbis

*Ahl al-Bayt*: The Prophet’s family

*Ahl al-Dhimmah*: Protected People

*Ahl al-Ḥaram*: The people of the sacred area

*Ahl al-Kitāb*: People of the Book which includes Christians and Jews

*Aḥnāf*: Pre-Islamic Arab monotheists who were non-Christians or non-Jews

*al-Abnā’*: The descendants of Persian troops who settled in Yemen

*al-‘Aqib*: The leader

*al-Azlām*: Divining arrows

*al-Ghasāsinah*: Ghassanids

*al-Ḥajar al-Aswad*: The Black Stone

*al-Hajras*: The son of the fox

*al-Ḥalal*: Permissible

*al-Ḥaram*: The Sanctuary or the official boundaries of Mecca

*al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b*: The Saint Aretha

*al-Ḥums*: Extremists in Ḥajj rites

*al-Jāhiliyyah*: Pre-Islamic period

*al-Kharāj*: agricultural land tax

*Allah*: The Supreme God

*al-Manāthirah*: Lakhmids

*al-Maqah*: The Moon deity

*al-Muḥajal*: A type of horse

*al-Sa‘ī*: Walking seven times between al-Ṣafā and al-Marwah

*al-Sayyid*: The administrator

*al-Shām*: Syria

*al-Shams*: Sun

*al-Shi‘rā*: The Sirius Sstar

*al-Talbiya*: The invocation of Ḥajj

*al-Thurayā*: Pleiades

*al-Ṭuls*: Moderates in Ḥajj rites

*al-Ukhdūd*: The Trench

‘*Ām al-Wuḥūd*: The Year of Delegations in 9 AH/ 630 CE when the Prophet Muḥammad received the delegations of Arab tribes to declare their acceptance of Islam.

‘*Aqīdah*: Creed – and sometimes means the study of Muslim doctrines

*Arkān al-Islām*: The Five Pillars of Islam

*Asbāb al-Nuzūl*: The occasions of the revelation of the Qur’an

*Aṣḥāb al-Kahf*: The Seven Sleepers

*Aṣnām* or *Awthān*: The Arabian idols

*Asquff*: The bishop

*Aswāq*: Arab markets or annual fairs

‘*Athtar*: The Venus deity

*Baḥr al-Qulzum*: Red Sea

*Banū Ismā‘īl*: The descendants of the Prophet Ishmael

*Bay‘āh*: Abbey or normal church

*Bayt al-Madāris*: The Jewish House of Schools

*Bayt al-Maqdis*: Jerusalem

*Cohen*: The Jewish priest

*Dayr*: Monastery

*Dhimmah*: The Pledge

*Dhū-Samawī*: The Lord of Heaven

*Fatwā*: Legal opinions in religious matters

*Fertile Crescent*: Syria and Mesopotamia

*Fiqh*: Jurisprudence

*Ghusl*: Washing their whole body

*Ḥaber*: The rabbi

*Ḥadīth*: The traditions of the Prophet Muḥammad that include his sayings and acts.

*Ḥajar*: Stone

*Ḥajj*: Pilgrimage

*Ḥanifiyya*: The ancient religion of the Prophet Abraham

*Ḥejārah*: Stones

*Ḥīrat al-Nu ‘mān*: al-Ḥīra

*Hūbar*: Hairy camel

*Ḥūlal*: Garments

*Hullah*: Garment

*Iḥrām*: The sacred state of Ḥajj

*Imām*: Leading worshippers in prayer

*Iraq*: Mesopotamia

*‘Īsā*: Jesus Christ

*Isnād* or *Snād*: The list of traditionalists, authorities or narrators who transmitted *Ḥadīth*

*Jahannam*: Hellfire

*Jiwār Allah*: The Protection of God

*Jizyah*: Poll Tax

*Kafārah* Day: The Day of Atonement

*Kanīsā*: Church

*Katātīb*: A form of primary school

*Kharāj*: Land tax

*Majūs*: Zoroastrians

*Makhālīf al-Yaman*: The regions of Yemen

*Mār Ya ‘qūbiyyīn*: Jacobites

*Martyrium*: A place where martyrs are buried

*Mawāḍi‘ al-Niyāḥa*: Mourning for the dead

*Miḥrāb*: The niche of the mosque

*Mubāhala*: The Imprecation

*Musnad*, The ancient southern Arabian language

*Mwāqīt*: Places stated for the Ḥajj

*Nūḥ*: The Prophet Noah



*Prophet Ibrahīm*: The Prophet Abraham

*Qarābīn*: Sacrifices

*Qiblā*: The direction of prayer

*Qūbba*: Dome

*Quss* or *Qussīs*: The Christian priest

*Ramī al-Jamarāt*: Stoning Devils

*Rashidun Caliphate*: the period following the death of the Prophet Muḥammad, ruled by four Caliphs from 632- 661 CE.

*Remlāl Ṣayhad*: The old name of the Empty Quarter Desert

*Ribā*: Usury

*Riddah*: The Wars of Apostasy

*Sādin*: Guardian

*Ṣaḥīfat al-Madina*: Constitution of Medina

*Ṣalah*: Peace

*Ṣalāt al-Janāzah*: Funeral prayer

*Ṣalāt*: Prayer

*Ṣawmā'a*: Hermitage

*Shammās*: Deacon

*Sunnah*: The Prophet's practices and sayings

*Tafsīr*: Commentary or exegesis on the Qur'an

*Ṭawāf*: Circumambulation, running around the Ka'ba

*ʿUmmah*: Nation

*ʿUmrah*: The lesser Ḥajj

*ʿUshr*: Tithe

*Wadd*: The moon deity

*Wāqif*: The servant of the church

*Yathrib*: The old name of Medina in pre-Islamic period

*Yaūm Kippūr*: Day of Ashura

*Zakāh*: Alms tax annually paid by rich Muslims to poor people in accordance with their custom

### **Note on the Referencing System**

The referencing system adopted in the thesis is the Harvard system, as required by the School of Philosophy, Theology and Religion guidelines. Footnotes are also used throughout the thesis to offer a brief description of characters, places and some terms that may perhaps be unfamiliar or that originally appeared in Arabic or other languages.

## **Introduction**

### **0.1 Rationale and Research Questions**

The present thesis aims to examine the main factors contributing to the establishment of several religious communities in the region of Najrān. It investigates the most important aspects of each religious community in terms of their origins, the impacts of their existence, the development of their theology, their rituals of worship and other aspects of the practice of their religion and how these religious communities have been impacted by the policy of Muslim rule.

The province of Najrān, located in the south-west of Saudi Arabia, contains archaeological sites that comprise exciting religious remnants and inscriptions, dating back to the pre-Islamic and early Islamic periods, such as churches, mosques, idols and religious inscriptions. These sites clearly reflect the existence of a multi-religious society in Najrān, in which a number of religious communities coexisted. However, a number of modern scholars such as al-Ḥadīthī (1986), Ali (1993), Dughaym (1995), Abū Jawdah (1997), al-‘Āyib (1998), Goddard (2000), Shahīd (2006), Nebes (2009) and Bertaina (2011) speak of Najrān as a centre of Christianity, with a minor presence of Jews, rather than being a multi-religious society during the period preceding the coming of Islam. Others, such as al-Masrī (1992), al-Murṭh (1992), Dalāl (1995) and Ibn-Jrais (2004), assume that Najrān was a fully Muslim society during the time following the expulsion of Jews and Christians from the region in 641 CE / 20 AH.

This all reflects an incomplete image for the religious structure of Najrān, due to the suggestion that Najrān was a multi-religious society that consisted of polytheists, Jews, Christians, Zoroastrians and Muslims. Therefore, the question that needs to be asked in this regard is: what was the religious structure of Najrān in the period immediately preceding the coming of Islam, and in the early Islamic period? The existence of different religious communities also suggests another question: how did each of them originate, develop and practise their religion? The domination of Islam over the region of Najrān posits another question: how did Islam influence the existence of these religious communities either in their relations with the Muslim authorities or in their freedom to practise aspects of their religious life?

The present thesis, therefore, seeks to make a significant contribution of value to the history of Najrān by studying its religious structure in the light of previous questions.

## **0.2 Study Hypothesis**

For this research, the current researcher has posited the hypothesis that between 525 and 661 CE the Najrān region represented a multi-religious society. Indeed, polytheism, Christianity, Judaism, Zoroastrianism and later Islam all found it possible to establish communities in Najrān. This hypothesis presumes that there were important factors that contributed to shaping the religious structure of Najrān and making it a multi-religious society. There were therefore significant reasons for the origins of each religious community and other factors that impacted on the development of all of them. The establishment of polytheism and Christianity, for example, had a great impact on the region. The religious beliefs of the followers of both communities developed over time, with significant changes in the understanding of theological concepts, rituals of worship, and kinds of deities in the case of polytheism in particular. Therefore, the thesis's hypothesis assumes that every religious community established its own unique religious identity through the adoption of aspects of religious life, such as places of worship, organisation of clerics, rituals of worship and theological beliefs.

The dominance of Islam since 9 AH / 630 CE presumably created major changes in the religious structure of Najrān, both in the existence of certain religious communities, and in the way they practised their religions. Polytheism, for instance, virtually disappeared from the religious map of Najrān as its devotees converted to Islam. The number of Muslims grew over time to form the majority of Najrānite people, while Christianity and Judaism lost their status to become just religious minorities. This means that the religious structure of Najrān underwent significant changes during the period of Islam as a consequence of the policy of Muslim authorities in dealing with the political, economic, social and religious situations in the region.

## **0.3 Methodology**

To fully answer the questions posed in the current thesis, this research will adopt a historical approach for the main chapters of the thesis. Before doing so, however, the journey of research should begin by defining the main problem of the study, stating the main questions, stating limitations and formulating the hypothesis as detailed previously. The next step is to collect information related to the questions of the present study from different types of primary and

secondary sources. In doing so, the author collected a large number of books, articles, dissertations, theses and manuscripts by accessing different academic centres such as the University of Birmingham, the British Library, and the King Faisal Centre for Research and Islamic Studies in Riyadh-KSA, in addition to personal collections. Moreover, the author visited the province of Najrān in August 2014 to take photographic images for the most important archaeological sites in order to provide some physical evidence for the present research.

The use of both primary so and secondary sources through the study's chapter will be conducted by following two main steps. In the first one, the research will present an overview of the two kinds of source, primary and secondary, as will be detailed in Chapter 1, the literature review. The author will adopt the approach of Garraghan (1946) in applying an external criticism to primary sources by examining the quality of the sources themselves in terms of type, accuracy, credibility, validity and relevance of the information of those sources to the fields of research.

The discussion of secondary sources will use Rampolla's (2012) method in assessing secondary sources, such as the purpose of the written work, approach, sources, main discussions and the date of publication. However, the most attention will be paid to the main questions of the current study by scanning a number of modern studies to consider whether the areas of the present thesis have been debated before.

In the second step, the author will adopt the historical method throughout Chapters two, three, four, five and six by creating an internal criticism on collected information from primary sources through the main topics of the thesis. This can be conducted by placing each topic in its historical context and then examining it in the light of primary source accounts and taking the chronological order into consideration. More clearly, the discussion of each issue will adopt the method of comparative textual analysis by examining two or more accounts offered by several primary sources or perhaps reported by the same source but in different accounts. In other words, the discussion of issues will be achieved by testing the main origins of the historical context such as the dates, characters, places, times, actions and factors concerned. It will consider the question as to what extent the given accounts agree or disagree on the historical context of issues and investigate the reasons behind that agreement and disagreement.

Besides this, for deeper interpretation the examination of research issues will be linked to relevant factors that might impact on the course of the events under discussion. In other words, the reason

for an episode occurring can be interpreted in the light of the political, religious and economic situations surrounding the region of Najrān during the period of that episode.

Furthermore, in order to develop the tools of the current study, its major topics will be assessed in the light of previous views or hypotheses that are produced by secondary sources. In other words, when a topic has been highlighted by secondary sources or there is a hypothesis relating to the topic, it will be assessed by placing the previous views in the context of the topic, using two approaches. In the first approach, previous views or hypotheses can be placed at the beginning of the context of the topic before evaluating accounts selected from primary sources. This approach will be adopted in case the author would like to argue these views or hypotheses in the light of new details that may not have been examined before. Second, if the question has not been debated before or there are already discussions with the same primary source information, the discussion will be adopted by examining details recorded by primary sources first, then debating the relevant views.

The final step in the methodology is to present the main findings of the research in two stages. The first one is to provide a summary of the key results on the themes of each chapter, while the second is to formulate the main findings of the overall study in the light of its main questions, as will be stated in conclusion.

#### **0.4 Scope of the Study**

The present study is limited in terms of both its geographical and temporal scope. In terms of the geographical scope, the study deals with Najrān as a region that comprises a central city of the same name, as well as groups of rural villages, valleys and Bedouin areas, rather than simply focusing on the city alone.

With regard to the temporal scope, the present study limits itself to the approximate period of time that begins with the collapse of the Ḥimyarite kingdom around 525 CE, and ends after the fourth decade of Islam, 40 AH / 661 CE. This means the present study will deal with two different periods: the first is the late pre-Islamic period, 525-622 CE, which includes the Abyssinian phase in South Arabia from 525 to around 597 CE, and the Persian occupation prior to the rise of Islam. The second period represents the early Islamic era, 622-661 CE, which is divided into two main phases: the Prophetic time (622-632 CE / 1-11 AH) and the Rashidun Caliphate era (632-661 CE/ 11- 40 AH). However, the study may need to investigate some events that occurred before or after the

main period under study, due to the context of each issue, as can be seen in examining the origins of the religious communities, which largely preceded the period of research by a long time.

The thesis will begin by giving a background on the area of research, before dealing with its main questions. The aim of this background is twofold: first, it offers a general understanding of Najrān before going through the main discussion of the research; second, it allows for the consideration of the role of this background in creating the religious structure of Najrān.

## **0.5 Structure of the Thesis**

This thesis consists of six chapters in addition to an introduction, conclusion and appendices.

The first chapter is divided into two main sections: primary sources and secondary sources. It will firstly present a review of the most important primary sources concerning the religious history of Najrān. These will be discussed under four categories: religious texts, Eastern Christian sources, Muslim sources and inscriptions. The main aim of this section is to give an overview of the most important accounts relating to the research questions. Meanwhile, the section on secondary sources consists of a number of studies in modern research. The discussion of these studies will begin with a brief mention of the most interesting studies on the history of Najrān. It will then critically focus on a number of studies that have examined areas relating to the topics of the study. This section seeks to see whether or not the topic of the present research has been investigated before.

The second chapter will present a background of Najrān in terms of its geography, demography, economy and history. It examines three main elements here: topography, etymology and location, in order to show the role of Najrān's geography in making it economically importance as an attractive place for human settlement over a long period of time. Then, the study investigates the economic importance of Najrān by debating the three main factors behind this importance: geographical location, abundance of water resources and fertile agricultural lands. All these factors will be linked to the flourishing of the main economic activities practised in Najrānite society, which include agriculture, grazing and ranching, industry, commerce and financial activities. The present thesis will focus on the question as to what extent these activities contributed to developing the religious structure of Najrān. To answer this question, the discussion will assess the role of these activities in establishing Jewish, Christian and Zoroastrian presences in the Najrān region.

In addition, the thesis will pay attention to the political history of Najrān throughout three main periods: ancient times, the Ḥimyarite-Abyssinian period, and the late pre-Islamic period. It focuses on outlining the most important events in the region by arguing that religion was often a critical factor in these events. The research will examine the influence of events happening during the ancient times, the Ḥimyarite-Abyssinian and the late pre-Islamic periods on the religious structure of Najrān. This examination will be built up by assuming that political factors were effective in establishing or impacting the existence of Jewish and Christian communities in the region, both before the period under study and during it, up to the decades preceding the advent of Islam.

The third chapter investigates polytheism in Najrān in the light of a general conception of polytheism in the Arabian Peninsula. It will debate the main features of polytheism in Najrān by examining its origins, kinds of deities, the theological concept of Allah, mixed beliefs and rituals of worship. In this chapter, the discussion will begin by tracing the development of polytheistic faiths from early stages prior to the period under research, in order to understand how polytheism created its identity. The thesis will then examine the worship of idols amongst Najrānite polytheists in terms of their historical and theological background, genders of idols and materials used in designing these idols. It will debate the concept of Allah (the supreme God) among the polytheists of Najrān by linking it to the concept of worshipping idols. The study also sheds light on other forms of veneration and worship that were practised by some Najrānite polytheists. Polytheistic rituals of worship will be examined in relation to their origins and types, and aspects of their practice. In addition, the practice of pilgrimage will be given special attention by examining two forms of it: the Ḥajj to Mecca and pilgrimage to different shrines of gods and goddesses across the Arabian Peninsula before the coming of Islam to the region of Najrān.

The fourth chapter deals with Judaism in Najrān by debating its historical origins, relations, status and religious aspects of the Jewish community. With regard to its origins, the present study seeks to understand how and approximately when Judaism established a presence in the region. The answer to this question requires a historical examination of the development of the Jewish presence in Najrān by tracing the situation of Jews in Najrān during the Ḥimyarite, Abyssinian and Persian periods of rule in South Arabia. The research will then pay detailed attention to the influence of the dominance of Islam on the existence of the Najrānite Jewish community. The last section in this chapter addresses the main aspects of the religious life of the Jewish community in Najrān: their houses of worship, clerical terminology, scriptures, rituals of worship and theological beliefs.



The fifth chapter explores Christianity in Najrān by investigating the development of its religious structure. It first outlines the origins of Christianity in Najrān by focusing on the issue of the arrival of the Christian faith in the Najrān region in terms of its approximate date, the country that Christianity came from and the earliest Christian preachers. The main discussion of its religious structure will start by examining the places of worship in terms of types, terms, locations, the rituals of worship performed and the people who lived in these places.

The thesis also concentrates on the religious thought of Najrānite Christians, in two sections. The first section will evaluate the development of theological doctrines amongst the Christians of Najrān, by discussing the role of political powers and missionary activities in establishing churches that were loyal to their doctrines in Najrān. The second section will pay detailed attention to the most important theological concepts that were expressed by the Christians of Najrān. It will explore the concept of the nature of Jesus Christ as the most disputed issue, due to its role in splitting the Najrānite Christians. The discussion will then highlight the understanding of other significant issues such as Prophethood, and the creation of Heaven, seas, Paradise and Hellfire.

In addition, there will be a detailed examination of the development, ranks, roles, duties and local terms of the Christian clergy. This chapter will conclude by examining some aspects of the rituals of worship, such as baptism, prayer, pilgrimage and monasticism.

The sixth chapter will discuss the early history of Islam in Najrān in view of how Islam influenced the religious structure of the Najrān region. It begins by tracing the early connections between Islam and the people of Najrān, to see whether there was an early Muslim presence in Najrān. The research then debates how Islam came to dominate in Najrān, in the light of the Prophet Muḥammad's policy toward the main powers in the region. There will be an examination of the conversion policy of Islam by debating its main steps: missions, building mosques and *Katātīb* (a form of primary school), and scholarly trips. The main aim of this section is to discover how Islam was propagated and became part of the religious structure of Najrānite society.

The thesis will allocate a detailed section on the policy of the Prophet Muḥammad and his Caliphs toward non-Muslims, mainly Jews and Christians, in Najrān. Here, the discussion will begin by assessing the documents that represent this policy in terms of their authenticity and main features. The discussion of their features will include main issues such as religion, security, economy and citizenship. There will also be an evaluation of Muslim policy on these issues and an examination of its influence on religious coexistence within Najrānite society.

The thesis will end with a conclusion that has two main sections. The first will outline the most significant findings of the chapters of the thesis, and the main answers to the questions posed by the study. The second section will present some interesting ideas for future research.

## **Chapter 1**

### **Literature Review**

#### **1.1 Introduction**

For the current research, a large number of primary and secondary sources exist, in particular pertaining to the main elements of the religious history of Najrān, such as the major factors behind the formation of its religious structure, the origins of its religious communities, their main beliefs, rituals of worship, places of worship, political affairs and the history of Islam in Najrān.

First, this chapter seeks to give an overview of the most important primary sources that provide valuable information on this topic, and to investigate their importance and credibility. In the course of doing so, the discussion of the current research will address whether or not this topic has been examined previously by scholars, as there are a significant number of secondary sources that clearly show what researchers have examined, argued and concluded on the issues addressed in this study. Before continuing with this chapter, it is important to mention that it is difficult to cover all works relevant to the current study, but the most important are covered here.

#### **1.2 Primary sources**

The term ‘primary source’ can refer to first-hand information reported by an eyewitness, or to documents dating from or near the time of the events in question. It also may include written materials that report and comment on historical accounts of events. In the current thesis, the term ‘primary source’ includes four categories: religious texts, Eastern Christian sources, Muslim sources and inscriptions. In this section, the main aim of discussing primary sources is to critically highlight the most important accounts related to areas of specific interest for this study. The examination of the reliability, authenticity and credibility of those accounts will be made in detail through the main chapters when debating the research questions.

##### **1.2.2 Religious texts**

Several scholars propose that the Bible and Qur’an can provide useful historical material for the Arabian Peninsula, despite not being primarily historical sources (Mahrān, 1988, Ali, 1993). For Najrān, although the Bible can be useful for linking Najrān to the origins of Judaism, the Qur’an

represents the most important scripture concerning issues of importance. One reference in the Qur'an tells the story of *Aṣḥāb al-Ukhdūd* (People of the Trench) which regularly refers to the persecution of Najrān Christians by the Ḥimyarite Jewish king, Dhū Nuwās<sup>1</sup> (Sūrat al-Burūj, verses 4-9). The Qur'an does not give specific details such as the identity of the religious community, date of the incident, characters and destinations. The significance of mentioning this story is to show how theologically and historically Muslim sources link the origins of Christianity in Najrān to the story of *Aṣḥāb al-Ukhdūd*.

The Qur'an also sheds some light on the major elements of polytheism, such as its origins, types of worship, the rituals and practices concerning pre-Islamic idols (*Aṣnām* or *Awthān*)<sup>2</sup>, and Arab polytheists' conceptions of Allah. The usefulness of these details can be seen in tracing the religious background of such elements from the Qur'anic perspective. In other words, the link between Qur'anic texts and other additional information offered by Muslim sources and southern Arabian inscriptions can provide a deeper understanding of the history of polytheism, as will be seen in Chapter Three (see sections 3.2, sub-section 3.3.3 and section 3.4).

In addition, the Qur'an provides significant details of the relationship between Muslims and Christians in Najrān in telling the story of *Mubāhala* (the imprecation) between the Prophet Muḥammad and the delegation of Najrān Christians (Sūrat Āl 'Imrān, verses 1-83). The significance of these details can be seen in the recounting of aspects of Najrānite Christians' views on theological issues that they argued about with the Prophet Muḥammad, as will be discussed in Chapter Five (see section 5.5).

As a result, the Qur'an is often found to be the most useful scriptural source for the present research, in particular when tracing theological issues related to polytheists and Christians in Najrān. Nevertheless, the Qur'anic information is still limited and cannot cover all the research issues because it is produced from a religious standpoint.

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1 Dhū Nuwās was the nickname of Yūsuf As'ar Yath'ar. An inscription identifies him as the last Ḥimyarite Jewish king, as will be seen in the following paragraphs (Assouad, 2016).

2 The term "idols" here refers to images or representations of gods and goddesses that were used as objects of worship.

### 1.2.3 Eastern Christian sources

The attention paid to Najrān by Eastern Christian authors is based on its religious importance as a major centre of Christianity. In this respect, the persecution of Christians in this area has been the focus of attention for Christian authors. A number of Syriac,<sup>3</sup> Ethiopian and Greek sources present significant information for the history of Christianity and Judaism in Najrān, as well as Islam later. These sources may contain some elements of legend and confused terms because most authors did not visit Najrān, and were unfamiliar with the Arabian background, dealing with Najrān from a Christian religious perspective rather than as a merely historical issue, or their information was occasionally transmitted by oral reports. However, the given material would be mostly accepted because the main subjects of this material are supported with strong evidence of their reality, as will be seen in debating the context of Chapter Four and Chapter Five.

Considering the Syriac sources first, there are interesting details which describe aspects of the history of Christianity, Judaism and later Islam in Najrān. Perhaps the oldest sources are *The Two Letters of Simeon of Bêth Arshām*,<sup>4</sup> who lived during the period of the persecution of Christians in Najrān (Hamilton and Brooks, 1899, Ya‘qūb, 1966, Shahīd, 1971). Both letters were apparently written with the purpose of persuading the Christian world to rescue the Christians of Najrān, who were being persecuted by the Ḥimyarite Jewish king, Dhū Nuwās. They contain interesting details recounted by many eyewitnesses who, Simeon says, were present during the persecution of Najrān’s Christians. The two letters are very important for the present study because they furnish details of the religious structure of Najrān, the clergy of Najrān’s Christians and some of their rituals of worship on the eve of the Ḥimyarite invasion.

The second source is *The Book of the Ḥimyarites*, written by an anonymous author who probably lived during the events of the persecution of Christians in Najrān. This book focuses only on the context of the persecution. It was translated into English, edited and first published by Moberg

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3 This language is also known as Syrian Aramaic due to its origins, derived from ancient Aramaic. Syriac is the language of Christian communities in Syria, Mesopotamia and eastern Arabia, and over the course of time it became the language of the Church in those countries, most rituals of worship were conducted in this language (Müller-Kessler, 2016).

4 Simeon of Bêth Arshām was a Monophysitic bishop of Bêth Arshām, a small town on the river Tigris near the city of Seleucia in Mesopotamia. He lived between 503 and 540 CE and is described as a philosopher, a scholar of Monophysitism and an author of a number of letters on his faith and on issues related to Najrān’s Christians (Afrām, 1976).

(1924) in a critical study. Moberg states that there are clearly chapters missing from this book, which probably relate to aspects of the early history of polytheism, Christianity and Judaism in South Arabia. The available chapters report in detail on the events of the persecution of the Christian community in Najrān. For the current research, the significance of this book is its provision of valuable details concerning the development of the clergy of the Najrānite church, their places of worship and the existing doctrines of Christians at this time. It also offers important details on the Jewish presence in the region in terms of their religious activities, external relations and role in persecuting the Christians of the region.

The third important source is *The Chronicle of Seert* (Scher, 1907), which was written by an anonymous author before the eleventh century CE. Although the date of this work is later than the period under study, its importance lies in the fact that it preserved details provided by missing sources. It contains significant information on the introduction of Christianity to Najrān and the establishment of Julianism in Najrān. The most important statements speak of the coming of a Christian delegation from Najrān to meet the Prophet Muḥammad in Medina. The anonymous author includes two covenants that are believed to have been written by the Prophet Muḥammad to the Christians of Najrān.

The authenticity of both covenants is a cause of significant disagreement in modern research. Scher (1907), Hamidullah (1956), Goddard (2000) and Wood (2013) believe that both documents are unreliable, while more recently Morrow (2013) and El-Wakil (2016) argue that both documents seem to contain correct elements, which make both acceptable. In the present research, the two covenants will be the subject of a detailed discussion in Chapter Six on the Prophet Muḥammad's policy toward the non-Muslims of Najrān (see section 6.5).

A fourth source is *Tārīkh Mār Mīkhā'il Al-Suryānī Al-Kabīr* (The General Chronicle of Michael the Syrian) by Michael the Syrian (1996). This source outlines the Abyssinian (*al-Ḥbāshī*) role in re-establishing the clergy of the church in Najrān and the adoption of Monophysitism among Najrānite Christians. It also mentions the Julianite sect as a part of the Christian community in Najrān. Michael the Syrian seemingly derived his information from earlier Eastern Christian sources. The importance of Michael the Syrian's Chronicle is its highlighting of two main topics: the clergy and doctrine of the Christian community.

The fifth source is *al-Tārīkh Al-Kanasī* (The Church History) by Hebraeus (2012),<sup>5</sup> which was written in the twelfth century. Although the author was a contemporary of other Muslim historians, he presented a partly different version of the visit of Najrān Christians to the Prophet Muḥammad, as can be seen by the names of the members of the Christian delegation.

Moving from Syriac to Greek, the oldest source is probably the Greek version of *The Martyrdom of Aretha*, which was written by an unknown author and is about the persecution of the leader of the Christian community in Najrān, the saint Aretha (Arethas), whose name is regularly translated as al-Ḥārith bin Ka'b in Arabic (Ibrāhīm, 2007). According to Huxley (1980), the author of this work probably relies on Syriac sources due to the similarity of the details in *The Martyrdom of Aretha* to what is told by *The Two Letters of Simeon of Bēth Arshām* and *The Book of the Ḥimyarites*. The first publication of this source was by Boissonade in 1833 CE, who relied on an old manuscript that perhaps dated back to the sixth century. This work was later translated into Latin by Charpentier in the *Acta Sanctorum* (Huxley, 1980). Ibrāhīm (2007) presents a critical comparative study of this work, by examining the available Arabic versions and the original Greek text and then producing a full version. In the current study, the importance of this source is due to its supplying useful information on several issues, such as the influence of Abyssinia in re-establishing the Christian community in Najrān, in terms of rebuilding places of worship, consecrating new clergy and adopting Monophysitism during their invasion of the region.

*The Acts of Gregentios* is a biography of St. Gregentius, who was appointed the archbishop of South Arabia after the victory of the Abyssinians (*al-Aḥbāsh*) (Berger, 2006). This work is a cause of scholarly disagreement concerning the identity of the author, when it was written, and the validity of its content (Christides, 1972, Shahīd, 1979, Abū al-Jadāyil, 2004). The importance of this work is that it provides significant details on the religious structure of Najrān after the Abyssinian invasion, especially the relationship between Christians, Jews and polytheists. It gives

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5 Bar Hebraeus was a Syriac scholar in theology, philosophy and history, born in 1226 CE in Malatya, a famous town located in present-day Turkey, and who later moved with his family to Antioch. There he studied theology, philosophy, history and medicine. Bar Hebraeus was consecrated as bishop of Gubos in 1249 CE and of Aleppo in 1252 CE, and he became the primate of the Syriac Church of the East in 1264 CE, a post which he held until his death in 1286 CE (Afrām, 1976).

details, for instance, about the construction of churches during the visit to Najrān by the Abyssinian king, Kālēb (Cālēb)<sup>6</sup> (Berger, 2006).

For Abyssinian sources, the most valuable work is *The Acts of Azkir*, which was authored by an unknown writer (Budge, 1928). This work chronicles the Abyssinian role in propagating Christianity in Najrān, conducted by the priest Azkir, before the persecution. Beeston (2005) critically evaluates the content of this work, noting that it contains “miraculous elements”, but that the most important part is the reference to Sharḥabīl Yankuf, who is mentioned in southern Arabian inscriptions as a Ḥimyarite king who reigned before the persecution, most probably in the fifth century CE. Beeston (2005) suggests that *The Acts of Azkir* indicates “isolated incidents” rather than the more well-known persecution (p 117). This conclusion is likely to be correct because the list of Ḥimyarite kings states that there is only one, King Sharḥabīl Ya’far bin Abī Karab, who ruled around 450 CE (Bāfaḳīh, 1985, Ali, 1993).

A later Ethiopian work entitled *The Book of the Saints of the Ethiopian Church* (Budge, 1928) preserves most of the content of *The Acts of Azkir*. It consists of several versions collected between the twelfth or thirteenth centuries and were translated from Greek, Arabic and Coptic (W., 1928). This work presents an account of the invasion of Najrān by the Abyssinian king, Kālēb, and his efforts to support the religious situations of Christianity in Najrān by restoring places of worship and bringing new clergy. This account is perhaps derived from early Christian sources on this topic, especially *The Book of the Ḥimyarites* and *The Martyrdom of Aretha*.

With regard to the present study, the significance of *The Acts of Azkir* is to highlight the Abyssinian role in the propagation and support of Christianity in Najrān.

In general, Christian sources supply valuable details of the history of Christianity in Najrān. There are, however, issues with these sources worth noting at this point. One issue is that important parts of these sources are missing, which deprives us of valuable details. The second concern is the focus of most Christian sources on the context of the persecution, rather than tracing the development of the Christian community in Najrān. It is true that they outline aspects of the religious practices of

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<sup>6</sup> He was the king of Axum in ancient Ethiopia (Abyssinia) and was contemporary with the persecution of Najrān Christians. There are not many details about this king, except what can be learnt from Christian sources with regard to his invasion of southern Arabia. The historian Procopius (1914) called him Ella Atsbeha, Ella Asbeha or Elesboas, while the Ethiopian work, the *Acts of Azkir* (Budge, 1928) referred to him as Kālēb.



this community, but the main attention is on the consequences of the persecution. The third issue is the fact that most of these sources probably reflect a Christian perspective, rather than recording balanced details. In other words, the main purpose of authoring *The Two Letters of Simeon of Bêth Arshām*, *The Book of the Himyarites* and *The Martyrdom of Aretha* was probably to serve the purpose of the Najrānite Christians by showing the tragic events of the persecution, especially the killing of children, women, clergy and their leader Aretha. Therefore, the content of these sources should be treated carefully.

#### 1.2.4 Primary Muslim sources

The Muslim (Arabic) literature includes a large number of primary sources that were written during the first centuries of Islamic history. However, the methods of collecting the materials for this primary literature are occasionally criticised, because most Muslim historians relied on oral transmission rather than documentary records when writing their works (Ali, 1993, Mahrān, 1999). This concern is sometime valid, especially when dealing with some occurrences in pre-Islamic history<sup>7</sup> (*al-Jāhiliyyah*) that were exaggerated or inaccurate, but it is significantly different from the writing of early Islamic history<sup>8</sup>. A number of modern historians, such as Rosenthal (1968), al-Dūrī (2000) and Rustum (2002) note that Muslim historians began using effective tools such as documents, referring to sources, adopting *Isnād*<sup>9</sup> in recording accounts and criticising the reliability of narrators. The major concern here is related to how Muslim scholars handle the history of non-Muslims in Najrān from a religious perspective, which will be taken into consideration during this study.

For the current study, Muslim sources provide much information on many topics concerning issues related to the historical context of religious life in the region of Najrān. The collection of most of this information, especially in the time of Islam, notably relied on the previous effective tools which support its validity for the present thesis. In other words, Muslim sources normally consist of

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7 The terms pre-Islamic history or *al-Jāhiliyyah* refers to the history of Arabs during the times preceded the advent of Islam (Ali, 1993, Berkey 2003).

8 It is widely agreed that the time of Islamic era began with the emigration of the Prophet Muḥammad to Medina in 622 CE (Watt, 1956).

9 *Isnād* or *snād* means the list of traditionalists, authorities or narrators who transmitted *Ḥadīth*, the history of the first century of Islam (Rustum, 2002, Robson, 2012).

multiple branches of historical sources, religious studies, literature and geographical works. The use of these multiple source types offers wide scope for evaluating the validity and importance of the contents of these sources, as will be detailed in the categories that follow.

#### **1.2.4.1 Historical Muslim literature**

Works of Islamic history are normally divided into several major classes, documenting the historical epochs of Islam from the seventh to the sixteenth century CE. Most researchers agree that these classes represent prophetic biography (*al-Sīra al-Nabawiyya*), biographical literature (*al-Ṭabaqāt wa al-Trājim*), genealogy (*al-Ansāb*), books of conquest (*al-Futūḥ*), local country history (*Tārīkh al-Buldān*) and books of world history (*al-Tārīkh al-‘Ām*).

For Najrān, a large number of historical sources provide innumerable details that explore significant aspects of its history in the social, political, economic and intellectual fields. However, it is notable that most of these sources concentrate on the political and administrative aspects of the period under study. Thus, they provide only limited details about the religious history of the region of Najrān. As evidence, Muslim historical sources supply little information on the religious history of the non-Muslim community, as can be seen clearly in the cases of Judaism, polytheism and Zoroastrianism, as will be shown in the chapters that follow.

The book known as *Sīrat Rasūl Allah (The Life of Muḥammad)* can be considered one of the most important sources for the current study. It was originally collected by Ibn-Ishāq (d. 767 or 761 CE) and later edited by Ibn-Hishām (1955) into a full version known as *al-Sīra al-Nabawiyya* (The Prophetic Biography). This work furnishes valuable details of important issues concerning Najrān, such as the arrival of Christianity in Najrān, told from a Muslim perspective, and the coming of the Najrānite Christian delegation to Medina and their dialogue with the Prophet Muḥammad. It also sheds light on the policy of the Prophet toward Najrān after it became subject to Muslim rule, in particular the regulations relating to the treatment of non-Muslims in Najrān. The validity of Ibn-Hishām’s account of the Prophet’s policy can be observed in two documents that show in detail the main features of this policy. Ibn-Hishām’s work, however, records a confused account of the theology of the Christians of Najrān, especially regarding their understanding of Jesus Christ (‘Īsā).

*Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kabīr (The Book of the Major Classes)* by Ibn-Sa‘ad (n.d.) offers biographical details about Najrānite individuals who came to Medina during the life of the Prophet Muḥammad. This book provides exceptional information concerning written documents drawn up by the Prophet

with the chieftains of the major clans of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Kaʿb. The significance of these documents is that they help to furnish important demographic details concerning religions in the region by the time of the advent of Islam. This can be seen in the locations of the clans of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Kaʿb at that time.

The most important three documents offered by Ibn-Saʿad are the Prophet's two covenants to the Christians of Najrān and his decree to the first residential governor of Najrān, ʿAmr bin Ḥazm. These three documents are essential for the present study in order to understand the religious, social, economic and political conditions of non-Muslims under Muslim rule. The authenticity of the two Prophetic covenants to the Christians of Najrān have been given attention through modern research; the two versions offered by *The Chronicle of Seert* will be discussed in Chapter Six (see sub-section 6.5.1).

The book *Dalā'il al-Nubūwwah (The Signs of Prophethood)* by al-Bayhaqī (1988) supplies valuable details about the connections between the Prophet Muḥammad and the Christians of Najrān. Although this work was written later than the previous sources, probably in the eleventh century, its value is in reporting in detail the debates between the leaders of the Christian community after receiving the Prophet's letter and the situation surrounding the drawing up of the Prophet's two covenants. More clearly, al-Bayhaqī (1988) spoke in detail about how the Prophet contacted the Christians of Najrān, and consequently received a delegation of three clergymen and offered them a peaceful covenant that contained terms regulating the relationship between both parties, before meeting another delegation of Najrānite Christians headed by the archbishop, Abū al-Ḥārith bin ʿAlqama. This book also provides interesting information on the religious demography of the valley of Najrān at the time of the rise of Islam.

Muslim historical works on *al-Kharāj* (agricultural land tax), mainly *Kitāb al-Kharāj* (Book of Taxation) by Abū-Yūsuf (1962), *Kitāb Al-Amwāl* (The Book of Revenue) by Ibn-Sallām (1975) and *Kitāb Al-Amwāl* by Ibn-Zanjawayh (2006), provide significant details concerning policy toward non-Muslims communities in Najrān during the time of the Prophet and his Caliphs. The three sources speak of how Muslim authorities adopted the terms of both Prophetic covenants, as well as the decree of ʿAmr bin Ḥazm, as the standard rules regulating the existence of Najrānite non-Muslims in terms of their security, economic wellbeing and religion. In addition, these sources offer

valuable details of how Muslim authorities fixed the taxation system for those non-Muslims, particularly *Jizyah*<sup>10</sup> (poll tax) and *Zakāh*<sup>11</sup> (alms tax).

In addition, there are a considerable number of biographical sources that shed light on Najrānite individuals living during the early time of Islam (al-Bukhārī, 1941, Ibn Abī-Ḥātim, 1973, Ibn-Ḥibbān, 1973, al-Mizzī, 1980a, al-‘Ijlī, 1984, al-Balādhurī, 1996, Ibn al-Athīr, 1997, Ibn-Ḥajar, 2010). The material provided by these biographical sources reflects details of scholarly activities after the arrival of Islam in the region, and these details are helpful for understanding how Islam became established in Najrānite society.

Books of world history, such as the *History* written by al-Ya‘qūbī (1883) (*Tārīkh Al-Ya‘qūbī*), *Knowledge and History* by al-Fasawī (1981) (*Kitāb Al-Ma‘rifah Wa-Al-Tārīkh*), *The Book of Admonition and Revision* by al-Mas‘ūdī (1981) (*al-Tanbīh Wa-Al-Ishrāf*), the *History* by al-Ṭabarī (1987); (*Tārīkh Al-Umam Wa-Al-Mulūk*) and the *History* by Ibn al-Athīr (1994), (*al-Kāmil Fī Al-Tārīkh*), are important for the current research in terms of shedding light on aspects of the religious history of Najrān during the pre-Islamic era, such as the origins of Judaism and Christianity in that region. These sources detail the conditions of non-Muslim communities during the Rashidun Caliphate era<sup>12</sup>, especially with regard to their relations with the second Caliph of Islam, ‘Umar bin al-Khaṭṭāb.

Besides these, there are important works that shed light on aspects of the religious history of the Arabian Peninsula in pre-Islamic history, works such as *Kitāb Al-Aṣnām* (The Book of Idols) by Ibn al-Kalbī (1924), *Kitāb Al-Muḥabbar* by Ibn-Ḥabīb (1942), *al-Ma‘ārif* by Ibn-Qūṭaybah (1981), *al-Ishtiqāq* (Etymology) by Ibn-Durayd (1991), *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal* (The Book of Sects and Creeds) by al-Shahrastānī (1992) and *‘Uyūn al-Akḥbār* (Choice Narratives) by Ibn-Qūṭaybah (1998). These works provide useful information concerning the religious life of the Najrānite polytheists in the

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10 *Jizah* in Islam can refer to the poll tax which is paid by non-Muslim adults who enjoy the full protection under Muslim rule (Paul, n.d., Newby, 2002).

11 *Zakāh* or *Zakāt* is one of the Five Pillars of Islam, can be described as obligatory tax, requirement or alms that has to be paid by rich Muslims in accordance to their propertities to poor Muslims (Newby, 2002, Campo, 2009, Zysow, 2012).

12 The Rashidun Caliphate (or Rightly-Guided Caliphate) refers to the period immediately following the death of the Prophet Muḥammad in 11 AH / 632 CE. In this period, there were four Caliphs who ruled the Muslim Empire successively until 40 AH / 661 CE: Abū-bakr al-Ṣiddīq, ‘Umar bin al-Khaṭṭāb, ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Affān and ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (Newby, 2002, Bosworth, 2012).

pre-Islamic era, such as their worship of idols and their sacred temples, the practice of pilgrimage and the concept of the Ka‘ba of Najrān. However, it is noticeable that the debate about these aspects comes from a Muslim perspective, rather than from examining them as historical realities. Therefore, there seems to be little information from these works in the field of the current study, as can be seen in Chapter Three.

Muslim works of genealogy are helpful for illuminating major issues in the current study. In particular, *Jamharat Ansāb al-‘Arab* by Ibn-Ḥazm (1948), *Nasab Ma‘add Wa-Al-Yaman Al-Kabīr* by Ibn al-Kalbī (1988) and *al-Ishtiqaq* by Ibn-Durayd (1991) refer to pre-Islamic deities worshipped by the Najrānite people, and record important details concerning Arab Christian clerics who were consecrated in the bishopric of Najrān. They reveal obvious details regarding two main issues: the deities of Najrānite polytheism and the development of the clergy of the Christian community in Najrān.

In summary, the Muslim historical sources provide a large amount of information on the history of Najrān, concentrating on the early time of Islam. This information, however, cannot cover all areas of the current study, especially the religious issues, because in these sources most attention is paid to the political and administrative topics of the region.

#### **1.2.4.2 The religious sciences of Islam (‘*Ulūm ad-Dīn*)**

This category is largely composed of those subjects on which religious studies focus, such as *Tafsīr* (commentary on the Qur’an), *Ḥadīth* (the Prophetic tradition), *‘Aqīdah* (creed) and *Fiqh* (jurisprudence) (Ali, 1993). The significance of religious studies here can be suggested by the fact that most authors of these religious studies are founders or early scholars in religious studies fields, such as Muqātil (d. 767 CE/150 AH),<sup>13</sup> Mālik (d. 795 CE/179 AH),<sup>14</sup> al-Shāfi‘ī (d. 820 CE/204

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13 Abū al-Ḥassan Muqātil ibn Sulaymān Al-Balkhī was a famous Muslim scholar of the Qur’an, who was born in Balkh in modern-day Afghanistan, and later settled firstly in Baghdad and then in Baṣra until his death in 150 AH/767 CE (Plessner and Rippin, 2012).

14 Mālik ibn Anas ibn Mālik ibn Abī ‘Āmir al-Asbahī was a prominent Muslim jurist and the founder of one of the main schools of Muslim jurisprudence, which is known as the Mālikī School. He was born in 93 AH/711 CE in Medina and lived there for most of his life until he died in 179 AH/795 CE (Wensinck, Robson, 2012).

AH),<sup>15</sup> Ibn-Ḥanbal (d. 855 CE/241 AH),<sup>16</sup> al-Bukhārī (d. 870 CE/256 AH),<sup>17</sup> Muslim (d. 875 CE/261 AH)<sup>18</sup> and al-Ṭabarī (d. 923 CE/310 AH).<sup>19</sup> Religious studies in Islam, therefore, provide significant information about religious communities, their relationships and their position toward Islam in this area, despite these sources being non-historical.

For instance, most of the books of commentary on the Qur'an shed light on the historical development of the relationship between Islam and Christianity in Najrān in debates on the occasions of the revelation of the Qur'an (*Asbāb al-Nuzūl*). The *Commentary of Muqātil* (1979) (*Tafsīr Muqātil Ibn Sulaymān*) is one of the oldest sources to speak of the encounter between the Prophet Muḥammad and the Christian delegation of Najrān. This work not only tells the details of this encounter, as narrated by Ibn-Hishām, but also speaks of the doctrines of the leaders of the Christian delegation. Therefore, it is suggested that this source provides additional knowledge on the issue of the theological doctrines of the Najrānite Christians. It is also suggested that the account of the *Commentary of Muqātil* (1979) seems rather more valuable than the *Commentary* of al-Ṭabarī (1995) (*Jāmi' Al-Bayān Fī Ta'wīl Al-Qur'ān*), as it speaks in detail of the persecution of Najrān's Christians, early connections between the Prophet Muḥammad and the Christians of Najrān and the story of the *Mubāhala*. Al-Ṭabarī noticeably relied on the Ibn-Hishām and Muqātil accounts for relating most of the details of these episodes.

However, later commentaries on the Qur'an written by al-Zamakhsharī (1947), al-Qurṭubī (1964), al-Wāḥidī (1968) and al-Bayḍāwī (1999) provide additional accounts of the relationship between

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15 Abū 'Abdullāh Muḥammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfi'ī was the founder of the Shāfi'ī School, which is one of the four schools of Muslim jurisprudence. He worked as governor of Najran in the reign of the 'Abbasid Caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd for a short time and later devoted himself to scholarly activities until he died in 204 AH/820 CE (Chaumont, 2012).

16 Abū 'Abdullah Aḥmad bin Muḥammad bin Ḥanbal al-Shaybānī was a prominent scholar of Islam and the founder of the Ḥanbalī school, one of the schools of Muslim jurisprudence (Laoust, 2012).

17 Abū 'Abdullah Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī was one of the most important Muslim scholars of *Ḥadīth*. He was born in Bukhārā in modern Uzbekistan. His collection of *Ḥadīth* is regarded as the most authentic one, due to his high standards when collecting (Robson, 2012).

18 His full name is Abū al-Ḥusayn 'Asākir ad-Dīn Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj al-Qushayrī an-Naysābūrī, but he was known as Muslim. He is regarded as one of the major scholars in *Ḥadīth* and his collection of *Ḥadīth* is widely considered to be one of the most reliable works in *Ḥadīth* (Juynboll, 2012).

19 His full name is Abū Ja'far Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, and he was a well-known historian, jurist and scholar of Qur'an. He was born in 839 CE/224 AH in Āmol, Tabaristan, in modern Iran, but spent the rest of his life in Baghdad, the capital of the 'Abbāsid Caliphate (Bosworth, 2012b).

Islam and the Christians of Najrān. The importance of these additional accounts can be seen in the fact that they record several meetings between both parties that differ from the *Mubāhala* incident. Such accounts shed more light on the doctrinal differences and theological concepts among the Christians of Najrān.

Works of *Ḥadīth* are useful sources in the current study, as they record the Prophet and his Caliphs' documents relating to the people of Najrān, whether Muslims or non-Muslims. Scholars of *Ḥadīth* such as Ibn-Ḥanbal (1969), al-Bukhārī (1997) and Muslim (2007) interestingly spoke of the dialogue between the Prophet Muḥammad and the delegation of the Christians of Najrān and related some details of the Prophet's instructions to his envoys to Najrān. This can provide additional evidence to examine the validity of the texts of these documents.

Early works of Muslim *Fiqh* are important in debating Muslim policy toward the non-Muslims of Najrān, especially in tax. They furnish historical details of how the Muslim authority adopted fixed rules for collecting both types of tax, *Jizyah* and *Zakāh* (Mālik, 1985, Ibn-Ḥazm, 1988, Ibn Abī-Shaybah, 1989, al-Shāfi'ī, 1990, Ibn-Qayyim al-Jawzīyah, 1997, al-Māwardī, 2003). Such important details can give a different understanding of the Muslim policy of tax, for both *Jizyah* and *Zakāh*, which will be examined in detail in Chapter Six (see section 6.5).

#### **1.2.4.3 Arabic literature (*al-Adab al-‘Arabī*)**

The term 'Arabic literature' usually refers to all the works that relate to the arts in Arabic, such as poetry, speech, prose and proverbs. These sources preserve a quantity of poetry that presents historical material, describing different aspects of Arab history in pre-Islamic and early Islamic times. The main concern regarding Arabic poetry is the possibility that it contains forged accounts (Ali, 1993). This concern was already addressed by Muslim scholars of literature who paid critical attention to it, especially to pre-Islamic poetry. Therefore, the available poetic material involves a significant amount of reliable information (Mahrān, 1999).

For the present study, encyclopaedic literacy sources such as the work of Ibn ‘Abd-Rabbih (1965), *al-‘Iqd al-Farīd* (The Unique Necklace), *Kitāb al-Amālī fī Lughat al-‘Arab* (al-Qālī, 1978), *Kitāb al-Aghānī* (The Book of Songs) by al-Iṣfahānī (1997b) and *al-Kāmil fī al-Lughah wa-al-Adab* (The Perfect Book of Language and Literature) by al-Mubarrad (1997) are very useful in terms of describing aspects of the history of Najrān during the pre-Islamic era. They discuss the political, religious, economic and social relationships between the local powers, mainly the Christian community and the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b tribe. In religious aspects, they include accounts of

mixed polytheistic rituals and beliefs, in light of speaking about several chieftains and nobles of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Kaʿb tribe during the pre-Islamic period.

Additional sources include collections of poetry and traditional proverbs, which detail polytheistic issues, such as their concept of Allah, the Supreme God as well as their worship of idols, belief in Jinn and the practice of divination (al-Aʿshā, 1950, al-ʿAskarī, 1964, al-Maydānī, 1978, al-Marzubānī, 1982, al-Ḍabbī, 1983, al-Hajrī, 1993, al-Ḍabbī, 1998).

Such information is essential in developing an understanding of the possible role of the political conditions in establishing a multi-religious society in the region, as will be discussed later. It is also useful in uncovering details of the history of polytheism in the region.

#### **1.2.4.4 Arabic geographical literature**

The works of Muslim geographers can be regarded for the present study as a valuable source for research. They contain much information about the geographical background of Najrān during the period under research. An overview of these sources shows that a number of them examine common issues, such as the location, the etymology, topography and the demography of the Najrān region.

In this regard, Najrān was an interesting topic for Muslim geographers in terms of its geographical location, whether in al-Ḥijāz or Yemen (Ibn-Khurradādhbih, 1889, Ibn-Rustah, 1891, al-Iṣṭakhrī, 1927, Ibn-Ḥawqal, 1938, al-Qazwīnī, 1960, Ibn-Saʿīd, 1970).

Two of those geographical sources outline the topography and demography of the area of Najrān, namely *Muʿjam mā Istaʿjama* (Dictionary of What is Found Incomprehensible) by al-Bakrī (1983) and *Muʿjam al-Buldān* (*The Dictionary of Countries*) by al-Ḥamawī (1995). Both sources define a group of valleys, mountains, towns and other geographical features across the region of Najrān. Although both sources partly relied on al-Hamdānī when outlining the geography of Najrān, both adopted Arabic poetic material as additional sources in describing the geographical features of the region. In religious aspects, al-Bakrī (1983) and al-Ḥamawī (1995) shed light on the Christian places of worship in Najrān and discuss the topic of the Kaʿba of Najrān as a pre-Islamic place of worship and pilgrimage for other Arab tribes during the pre-Islamic age. Also, concerning the history of polytheism, al-Bakrī (1983) and al-Ḥamawī (1995) are useful in shedding light on idol worship and the practice of pilgrimage among Najrānite polytheists towards the end of the pre-Islamic era.



The most useful geographical source is *Ṣifat Jazīrat al-‘Arab* (The Character of the Arabian Peninsula) by al-Hamdānī (1989). This source presents many details of the geography, topography and demography of Najrān that do not exist in other sources. The author may have drawn his material from visits to Najrān; he lived in Yemen which is close to this region (al-Hamdānī, 1989). Al-Hamdānī drew a detailed map showing the population of towns, villages, valleys and nomadic areas in the region at the beginning of the 10<sup>th</sup> century CE. He gave rich accounts of many of the towns and villages that lie in the great valley of Najrān, where several clans of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b, Yām, Wād‘ā and Banū Shākr tribes lived, as well as the area of the Ḥabūnān valley (currently Ḥabūnā) (al-Hamdānī, 1989). Al-Hamdani also discussed several economic and political issues of Najrān’s history, such as the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b’ relations with its neighbours, agricultural production and water resources. However, although al-Hamdānī’s accounts appear of high value in terms of giving a considerable amount of information on the background of the current area of research, this information is suspect because the demography of Najrān by the time of al-Hamdānī had witnessed significant changes.

It is suggested that geographical sources are helpful in describing the background of Najrān in terms of its economy and demography. They also provide some important details concerning aspects of the religious life in the region.

#### **1.2.4.5 Summary of Muslim sources**

In summary, although Muslim sources provide much information on many topics, there appear to be problems in the relevance of these sources to the interests of the present study. Firstly, their records of the pre-Islamic history of Najrān offer few details of the three religions in the region: polytheism, Judaism and Christianity. This may be due to the use by most Muslim historians of oral material for recording pre-Islamic history, rather than using documentary information. Secondly, although they offer many details in regard to the period after Islam arrived in Najrān, the focus of most Muslim sources is on the political aspect of the relations between the Muslim and non-Muslim communities. Therefore, there is scant information concerning the religious history of these non-Muslim communities. It is true that considerable attention is given to the doctrine and clergy of the Christian delegation of Najrān, but this attention causes another problem, which stems from confusion concerning the types of doctrine and terms for the clergy. This is perhaps because most Muslim authors were not fully familiar with the religious aspects of Christianity. Furthermore, the Muslim sources documenting the history of non-Muslims in Najrān reflect a Muslim perspective, although

their accounts are largely acceptable. This requires a careful approach to using these accounts, by adopting comparative and analytical methods.

### **1.2.5 Inscriptions and archaeological remains**

Many ancient southern Arabian inscriptions contain valuable historical material. Most of them were recorded in *Musnad*, the ancient southern Arabian language (Bāfaqīh, 1985, al-Iryānī, 1990). According to epigraphic research, more than a thousand southern Arabian inscriptions have been recorded, edited and reported in a number of studies (Nāmī, 1943, Philby and Tritton, 1944, Jamme, 1962, Bāfaqīh et al., 1985, Kitchen, 2000). Among these inscriptions, it can be noted that Najrān is mentioned many times, which could be helpful in outlining aspects of its history during the pre-Islamic period. They also contain valuable details of polytheistic practices, deities and beliefs in Najrān during the pre-Islamic era. These inscriptions indicate that several deities, such as Dhū-Samawī (the Lord of Heaven), ‘Athtar, al-Maqah and al-Shams (Sun), were worshipped by some Najrānites in the pre-Islamic period.

In the region of Najrān, there are a large number of inscriptions, most of which have been recorded (Philby and Tritton, 1944, Schiettecatte, 2010). Two groups of Najrānite inscriptions were recently collected by al-Ḥazmī (2011) and al-Khudair (2012) and provide fresh details of idols such as al-Lāt, al-‘Uzzā and Wadd, and polytheistic rituals such as performing sacrifices (*Qarābīn*), burning incense and reciting invocations. These details were discovered through archaeological research at several sites across the region of Najrān. In addition, the research on the town of al-Ukhdūd (the Trench), conducted by Saudi archaeological missions, made significant discoveries of the remains of shrines, pieces of furniture, household ware and walls of buildings (al-Zahrānī et al., 2005, Bin Tairan, 2005). According to the archaeological research, these discoveries reveal important aspects of pre-Islamic polytheism in the region, such as types of deities, rituals, beliefs and religious occasions.

However, in summary, although inscriptions and archaeological remnants offer valuable and reliable details, these details are still limited and may not be enough to fully answer the questions of current research.

### 1.3 Secondary sources

Generally, secondary sources are works that discuss, interpret and examine the accounts in the primary sources. For the present study, the secondary sources consist of a number of modern studies, some of which examine Najrān as their main focus, whereas other works address aspects of the history of Najrān as only of minor relevance. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the main aim of discussing the secondary sources here is to see whether the current study's topic has been examined before. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, there is no specific study that has investigated religious life in the region of Najrān as an independent topic of discussion.

It is true that a number of studies have been produced on the history of Najrān, particularly its political, economic, social and literary history during pre-Islamic and early Islamic history (Philby, 1952, 'Āmir, 1978, al-'Aqīlī, 1984, al-Murīḥ, 1992, Dalāl, 1995, al-Ansary and al-Murīḥ, 2003, al-'Amrī, 2004, al-'Utaybī, 2009). Some of these studies seem to have been written for the general public rather than for academic research, such as *Najrān fī Aṭwār al-Tārīkh* by al-'Aqīlī (1984), *Najrān fī al-'Aṣr al-Jāhilī wa-fī 'Aṣr al-Nubūwah* by 'Āmir (1978), *Hadhihi bilādunā: Najrān* by al-Murīḥ (1992) and *Najrān: Munṭa aq al-Qawāfil* by al-Ansary and al-Murīḥ (2003). Meanwhile, other studies have debated political, social, economic and religious issues. While examining these studies, the focus will be solely on examining whether or not the question of how the religious structure formed and developed is evaluated. In other words, there could be some interest given to the religious communities of Najrān, particularly their origins and relationships, but the issue of how members of different religious communities lived their religious lives will be the essential matter here.

One of the sources is *Arabian Highlands* by Philby (1952), who allocates two chapters of his book to a discussion of the region of Najrān, entitled *The Land of Yām* and *The High Plateau*. The author claims to have discovered the location of the Ka'ba of Najrān after visiting the Taṣlāl Hills in the east of the Najrān valley. On his visit, Philby found landmarks that probably indicated a processional way (*Maṭāf*) and the circumambulation of this Ka'ba that was the focus of his claim. The most problematic issue for Philby's claim is that he seemingly fails to mention his sources on this particular issue. However, the significance of Philby's study is that it draws a precise topographical map of the whole region, using modern technical capabilities.

The second study is *Bayna Makkah Wa Ḥaḍramawt*, a book written by al-Bilādī (1982). This book seems to be a descriptive account of the author's journey to Najrān but it contains significant

information. At the beginning, the author gives a historical background on the tribes that settled in Najrān during the pre-Islamic era and early Islamic history, concentrating on the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b and Banū Yām. Although this book is descriptive, rather than giving critical analysis concerning these issues, its importance lies in its detailed information concerning two archaeological sites visited by the author: the claimed location of the Ka‘ba of Najrān and the remnants of the religious building in al-Ukhdūd.

The third study is an article by al-Ḥadīthī (1986) in *Najrān Ahmīthā wa ‘Alāqthā fī al-Islam* which assesses the importance of Najrān and its relationship to Islam. The author briefly outlines the religious conditions of Najrān before the rise of Islam in view of its three religions: polytheism, Judaism and Christianity. He then sheds light on the development of the relationship between Najrān and Islam, from the first meeting between Najrān’s Christians and the Prophet Muḥammad in the early years of his life in Mecca. The author finally turns his attention to the relationship between the Muslim authority and the non-Muslims of Najrān, mainly Jews and Christians, concentrating on the expulsion of non-Muslims in the time of Caliph ‘Umar bin al-Khaṭṭāb. Notwithstanding the significance of the study’s themes, it is clear that it does not cover in depth other important matters through these themes, such as the main features of religious life and the impact of early Najrān-Islam connections on the spread of Islam to this region.

A similar study is an article by al-Masrī (1992), *Najrān wa Dūrhā al-Siāsī wa al-Iqtisādī*, which examines the political and economic role of Najrān during the early Islamic era. The author outlines how the people of Najrān, mainly the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b tribe and the Christian community, yielded to Muslim authority. The most important part is the discussion of the reasons why the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b tribe became Muslim, which can be classed as either religious or political. Here, al-Misrī focuses on the religious role of Muslim governors who took it upon themselves to educate the local people in Muslim religion, culture, and rituals of worship. The final part highlights the conditions of Najrānite Christians and Jews under the Rashidun Caliphate, with a special discussion on the main reasons behind Caliph ‘Umar’s decision to expel them from Najrān. Al-Misrī’s study resembles al-Ḥadīthī’s article in terms of its themes, sources and conclusions, as can be seen in its examination of the context of the expulsion of the Jewish and Christian communities from Najrān.

*Al-Bayān fī Tārīkh Jāzān wa-‘Assīr wa-Najrān* by Dalāl (1995) presents a general study on the history of Jāzān, ‘Assīr and Najrān, three provinces in southern Saudi Arabia. In the section on

Najrān, the author briefly presents a short account of the political, social, religious and economic conditions of Najrān during the pre-Islamic era. This account includes the arrival of Christianity, the persecution of Najrān's Christians, the tribal structure and the economic connections between Najrān and Mecca before the coming of Islam. Next, Dalāl outlines what the Muslim sources say about the arrival of Islam in Najrān and the conditions of non-Muslims, especially Christians, in the reign of Caliph 'Umar bin al-Khaṭṭāb.

In general, although the book discusses issues concerning the interests of the current study, it does not cover the religious preoccupations of Najrān's communities at the time. In addition, most of the book's contents are derived from primary Muslim sources, rather than using different types of source to enrich the book's topics.

The fourth book, *Najrān: Dirāsah Ttārīkhīyah Ḥaḍārīyah*, was authored by Ibn-Jrais (2004) and is a detailed study on the history of Najrān between the 7<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries. This study gives a comprehensive account of Najrān's geography, political circumstances in the pre- and early Islamic period, its cultural activities, social and economic conditions and administrative organisation under Muslim rule. In the section related to religious matters, the author outlines the kinds of faith that were practised until the emergence of Islam, in particular Christianity and its appearance in the region. Noticeably, Ibn-Jrais mostly does not differ from the previous authors in terms of his main sources, conclusions and common understanding concerning issues related to the present study. This can be seen in his adoption of the same opinions when describing the population of Najrān at the advent of Islam and the expulsion of Jews and Christians from Najrān.

More recently, āl-Hatīlah (2015) presents a study in *Najrān wa-al-Naṣrānīyah al-'Ul* that highlights aspects of the region's history, with special attention to the story of Christianity. The author debates the origins of Christianity in Najrān and the doctrines of Najrānite Christians. The most important chapter is a brief account of the religions of Najrān in pre-Islamic history, including ancient monotheism, Christianity, Judaism, polytheism and Mandaism (*al-Ṣābi'ah*)<sup>20</sup>. In the

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20 Mandaism, in Arabic *Mandā'īyah* or *al-Ṣābi'ah*, is an ancient religion that emerged in the ancient Near East. Its followers describe it as a monotheistic religion, revering ancient prophets such as Adam, Noah and Seth but rejecting Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muḥammad. The followers of Mandaism regard John the Baptist as their main prophet (Drower, 1953, Rudolph, 2006).

chapter, the author describes the cult of several pre-Islamic deities that were worshipped by Najrānite polytheists before the coming of Islam.

Evidently, āl-Hatīlah's study discusses issues that are essential to the focus of the current research, but there appear to be problems in this study in dealing with these issues critically. These problems can be seen in the lack of examining in detail most of these religions in terms of their origins, rituals and places of worships. The problem of sources is the main concern here, as can be observed in the reliance by the study on Muslim sources rather than Christian accounts for major issues, particularly the origins of Christianity and the doctrinal development of the Christians of Najrān. In addition, the citation of the study's sources is obviously missing in places, as can be seen in the themes of ancient monotheism and Mandaism.

Besides the previous general studies, there are other studies on specific topics concerning the historical context of Christianity in Najrān in terms of its origins and spread, the persecution of its followers and the consequences of the persecution incident, as can be seen in studies offered by Abū Jawdah (1997), Nebes (2009), Sakhnīnī (2013) and Fisher et al. (2015). Meanwhile, others debate specific issues; for instance, Harvey (1996), Brock and Harvey (1998) and Barrett (2013), who examined the cases of women martyred in the persecution, Papathanassiou (1993), who detailed the missionary history of Christianity in South Arabia, and Dziekan (2012), who discussed the historical context of the bishop (*Asquff*) of Najrān, Quss bin Sā'ida al-Iyādī<sup>21</sup>.

In a more relevant study, Abū al-Jadāyil (2004) wrote an article, *Dīyānat Shuhadā' Najrān*, on the religious identity of Najrānite martyrs. The author argues that the people who were persecuted by the Ḥimyarite king Dhū Nuwās were probably *Ahnāf* (or *Ḥanīfs*), following the monotheism of the Prophet Abraham, rather than Christians. She adopts this claim in view of the Qur'anic text on the story of *Aṣḥāb al-Ukhdūd* and some southern Arabian inscriptions. Abū al-Jadāyil (2004) therefore doubts the credibility of the Christian and Muslim versions and claims that the purpose of building the Ka'ba of Najrān was to celebrate the memory of the Najrānite martyrs among Christians by establishing a church that came to be called the *Martyrium*. Abū al-Jadāyil's conclusion clearly

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21 Quss bin Sā'ida al-Iyādī was a prominent Arab of the Banū Iyād tribe and was bishop of Najrān during the pre-Islamic period. There is no specific date for his tenure, but Muslim sources relate that the Prophet Muḥammad saw him at the fair of 'Ukāẓ when he was young. Quss bin Sā'ida certainly was not alive when the Prophet Muḥammad announced his Prophethood (al-Sijistānī 1961, Ibn 'Abd-Rabbih 1965, al-'Askarī 1964, Meisami 1998, al-Jāhiz 2002).

disagrees with the many Muslims and Christian sources that affirm the fact that the martyrs of Najrān were certainly Christians.

Studies of a third type are interested in examining the documentary sources of Christianity in Najrān, as can be seen in the critical study by Moberg (1924) on *The Book of the Ḥimyarites*, and also in *The Martyrs of Najrān: New Documents* (Shahīd, 1971), which contains critical analysis and documentary content on *The Two Letters of Simeon of Bēth Arshām*, *The Book of the Ḥimyarites* and *The Martyrdom of Aretha*. The value of both studies lies in their evaluation of the origins of these sources in terms of authorship, the versions of each source and the reliability of their content.

It is also suggested in the documentary book *al-Shuhadā' al-Ḥimyarīyūn al-'Arab fī al-Wathā'iq al-Suryānīyah*, authored by Ya'qūb (1966). Although this book was apparently written with the purpose of documenting *The Two Letters of Simeon of Bēth Arshām* and *The Book of the Ḥimyarites*, the author offers a discussion of the theological doctrine of the early Christians of Najrān in view of their relationship with the Abyssinian church, Syriac clerics in Syria (*al-Shām*) and Mesopotamia (Iraq), and previous Syriac documents. Although his conclusion is supported by strong evidence, the author seems to deal with this issue from the perspective of a Christian cleric, rather than that of a historical researcher, as can be seen in his rejecting the term 'Jacobism' and preferring the term 'orthodox' to describe the specific doctrine of the persecuted Christians in Najrān.

Another similar perspective is given by Berger (2010) in his article *Christianity in South Arabia in the 6th Century AD: Truth and Legend*. The author examines the situation of Christianity in Najrān during the Abyssinian occupation of South Arabia in the light of the *History of the Wars* (Procopius and Dewing, 1914) and *The Acts of Gregentios* (Berger, 2006). This most recent work, *The Acts of Gregentios*, by Berger has been given the most attention because his main question is about missionary activities in Najrān and other southern Arabian regions.

The studies by Moberg, Shahīd, Ya'qūb and Berger still paid the most attention to the early period of Christianity in Najrān, which lasted from its arrival until the Abyssinian invasion of South Arabia around 525 CE, while the period of the current study runs from this date until the end of the Rashidun Caliphate era in Islam. There are several studies that examine aspects of Christianity and Judaism during this period.

One of these is a section entitled *Byzantium and Najrān* in Shahīd's work *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fifth Century* (Shahīd, 1989). The most important theme in this section is a critical examination of the doctrinal development among the Christians of Najrān from the arrival of Christianity prior to the establishment of Monophysitism as the dominant doctrine of the Najrānite church after the Abyssinian invasion of South Arabia around 525 CE. This critical examination is quite early in the period of the present study, and Christianity made significant changes in its doctrinal structure during the period that followed.

Another work of his, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century, Vol. 2, Part 1* contains valuable discussion on the Christian places of worship in Najrān (Shahīd, 2002). This discussion traces the development of the Ka'ba of Najrān, church) and monastery in terms of architecture, shapes and staff. Shahīd significantly pays only brief attention to the flourishing of monasticism among Najrānite Christians during the sixth century, outlining its rules, rituals and places. Both the issues of places of worship and monasticism are central in debating the most important aspects of the Christian religious life in Najrān. It is noticeable that Shahīd mainly relies on well-known Muslim scholars, mainly al-Bakrī (1983), al-Ḥamawī (1995) and al-Iṣfahānī (1997) to adopt his conclusions. However, despite the fact that the three works are very important to the current study, their accounts raise some questions, especially the question of concerning the Christian places of worship. Therefore, there is still a need for further critical investigation into additional and early Muslim accounts offered by Muslim sources, which reveal more interesting facts, as will be seen in Chapter Five (see section 5.3).

Another important study produced by Shahīd is *Byzantium in South Arabia* (Shahīd, 1979), which highlights in greater detail the major aspects of the religious life of the Christian community in Najrān. The author investigates in detail their places of worship in relation to types, terms and architecture. He also discusses the dedication of Najrān as a holy place of pilgrimage. Noticeably, the discussion of both issues is based on considering the Ka'ba of Najrān as a Christian place of worship. Shahīd also sheds light on the clergy of the Najrānite church in terms of its establishment, holy orders and conditions at the time of the persecution of Najrānite Christians.

Similarly, Trimmingham (1979) in his book, *Christianity among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times*, includes a special section on *Christianity in Najrān*. He sheds light on significant issues such as the structure of the clergy of the Najrānite church on the eve of the persecution, the growth of Monophysitism among Najrānite Christians and the impact which the doctrinal dispute in the



Eastern Church had on the Monophysitic influence, as can be seen by the establishment of the Phantasiast sect (Julianism). The author pays considerable attention to the doctrine of bishop Abū al-Hārith bin ‘Alqama, considering him loyal to regular Monophysitism. Similar to Shahīd, the author talks of the Ka‘ba of Najrān as the Arab term for the central church of Najrān.

Likewise, Borge (2011), in his article *A Historical Survey of the Rise and Spread of Christianity in Arabia in the First Six Centuries AD*, speaks of how Christianity was re-established after the Abyssinian invasion by restoring its places of worship and making the central church of Najrān a martyrion for pilgrimage. It is clear that Borge (2011) relies on Shahīd’s works and debates in presenting his discussion as can be seen in his adopting Shahīd’s point of view when he regards the Ka‘ba of Najrān as the Arabic term for martyrion.

The three studies by Shahīd, Trimingham and Borge are valuable for discussing the main issues in the present research, such as doctrinal development, places of worship, clergy and pilgrimage. However, further exploration of these issues is still required, by re-examining Shahīd and Trimingham’s conclusions in the light of additional details, as will be discussed in Chapter Five (see sections 5.3 and 5.4).

Concerning the delegation of Najrānite Christians, one study authored by ‘Ajībāh (2004) on *Naṣārā Najrān Bayna al-Mujādalah wa-al-Mubāhala (The Christians of Najrān: Between Dialogue and Imprecation)* deals with the historical and theological context of the dialogue between the Prophet Muḥammad and the Najrānite Christian delegation. The author debates the major issues of this dialogue, which concentrates on the Christology of Jesus Christ. The author’s discussion, however, does not mention what doctrine the Christian delegation adopted. It appears to reflect the Muslim perspective toward the Christology of Jesus Christ rather than giving a historical account.

A similar study was conducted by Nickel (2006), entitled *We Will Make Peace With You: The Christians of Najrān in Muqātil’s Tafsīr*. This study gives considerable attention to how Muqātil recorded theological issues that were argued over in the interfaith dialogue between both parties, such as the Christology of Jesus Christ, the doctrine of the Christian delegation and the attitude toward Muḥammad’s Prophethood. The author also examines the similarities and differences between Muqātil’s version and Ibn-Sa‘ad and Ibn-Hishām’s accounts of this meeting, in particular the matter of *Mubāhala*. He sheds light on the question of why Christians rejected *Mubāhala* in view of the three accounts of Muqātil, Ibn-Hishām and Ibn-Sa‘ad. Nickel, however, does not give the same attention to the differences on theological issues between the three versions, especially the

theological doctrine of the Christian delegation of Najrān. This raises a significant question concerning the doctrinal identity of the Christians of Najrān at the advent of Islam.

This specific question was recently examined by Block (2012) in his article *Philoponian Monophysitism in South Arabia at the Advent of Islam*. The author examines the development of Monophysitism among the Christians of Najrān prior to the advent of Islam. Block's assumption is clearly based on examining the Abyssinian role in the re-establishment of Christianity in Najrān. He concludes that the members of the delegation of Najrānite Christians, especially their bishop, Abū al-Ḥārith bin 'Alqama, were Monophysites. Although Block produces a critical discussion on the doctrinal issues of Najrānite Christians, his assumption is mainly adopted in view of Ibn-Hishām's account of the encounter between the Prophet Muḥammad and the Najrānite delegation. In fact, there are additional accounts of the relations between the two parties, both Muslim and Christian sources, which could reflect a different conclusion, as will be investigated in Chapter Five (see section 5.4).

More recently, an article by Robin (2015), *Ḥimyar, Aksūm, and Arabian Desert in Late Antiquity: The Epigraphic Evidence*, supposes that the established Christian community in Najrān probably consisted of Nestorians<sup>22</sup> and Monophysites. This point of view has already been refuted by Shahīd (1989) by proving that Ḥayyān, the first Najrānite convert to Christianity, was baptized in al-Hīra at the beginning of the fifth century CE, before the establishment of the Nestorian Church which occurred after the split in Eastern Christianity at the Council of Ephesus in 431 CE.

In the history of Judaism in Najrān, it is difficult to find any specific study examining the context of the Jewish presence in Najrān as a major community in the context of religious pluralism, except in a study by Lecker (1995b), *Judaism among Kinda and the Ridda of Kinda*. He examines several issues regarding the Jews of Najrān, such as the claim that the Jewish faith arrived in Najrān in the 10<sup>th</sup> century BCE, the spread of Judaism among the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka'b tribe in Najrān, and the relationship between Najrānite Jews and the Muslim authorities after becoming subject to Muslim rule. However, Lecker's main research focus is on the practice of Judaism among the Kinda tribe, and his discussion seems to rely only on Muslim historians rather than exploring other types of source. These historians cannot offer further details concerning important issues, such as the

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22 Nestorianism is one of the eastern Christian doctrines, established by Nestorius (386–450 CE), Patriarch of Constantinople. The followers of Nestorianism were considered heretics by the Council of Ephesus (431 CE) and Council of Chalcedon (451 CE), but established churches in Mesopotamia under Sasanian rule around 424 CE (Rist, 2006b).

conditions of Judaism in Najrān after 525 CE but prior to Islam, its ties to the Jews in al-Ḥijāz and Palestine and the most apparent aspects of its religious life.

In addition, the relationship between Islam and the non-Muslims of Najrān has been a question of interest for several studies, in terms of the authenticity of the documents of the Prophet Muḥammad and Rashidun Caliphate, or the decision of Caliph ‘Umar bin al-Khaṭṭāb to expel non-Muslims from Najrān later. For documents, the scholars Hamidullah (1956) and al-Ḥiwālī (1976) provide a general collection and examination of most of the documents from Najrān that were written during the Prophetic and Rashidun Caliphate periods. Both scholars agreed that most of these documents, especially those offered by Muslim sources, are generally accepted due to several factors, such as these documents being referred to in many Muslim sources, and the survival of some fragments of the original documents that were written on leather.

The authenticity of the covenants of the Prophet Muḥammad with the Christians of Najrān has been a question of debate among scholars. While Hamidullah (1956) and al-Ḥiwālī (1976) adopted the Muslim version of both documents, Morrow (2013) argues that “since the Christians of Najrān had concluded several treaties with the Prophet, granting them unprecedented rights and liberties, there exists no logical reason for them to falsify a covenant which is essentially the same as ones granted to them previously” (p114).

More recently, El-Wakil (2016), in his article *The Prophet’s Treaty with the Christians of Najrān*, offers a new critical and comparative analysis of the details of both documents in view of both the Muslim and Christian versions. Unlike Hamidullah and al-Ḥiwālī, the author leans toward accepting the Christian version of the two Prophetic covenants to the Christians of Najrān, as recorded by *The Chronicle of Seert*. He claims that Muslim sources may include deliberate manipulation, and the original texts of the Muslim version of the two covenants are perhaps corrupted.

The debates over these documents will be a major part of discussing the policy of the Muslim authorities toward non-Muslims in Najrān, in view of additional factors that may not otherwise be taken into consideration, such as the Prophet’s linguistic style, the survival of some fragments of these covenants, and the individuals recorded in them, as will be detailed in Chapter Six (see subsection 6.5.4).

Moreover, El-Wakil (2016) in the same study debates the context of the warning letter sent by Caliph ‘Umar bin al-Khaṭṭāb to the non-Muslims of Najrān, supposing that that the expulsion of

Jews and Christians from Najrān seems to have been a voluntary relocation rather than a compulsory process.

The decision of Caliph ‘Umar bin al-Khaṭṭāb to expel Jews and Christians from Najrān had already been questioned by Fāyda (1983) in his short article, *Ijlā’ ‘Umar Bin Al-Khaṭ āb Li Ghair Al-Mūslimīn Min Najrān Wa Khaybar Wm Ā Jāūrhā*. He examines this decision by considering the military threat to Muslims of their existence as perhaps the most likely reason for the expulsion. Meanwhile, Lecker (2010), in his article *The Najrān Exiles in Iraq, Syria and Baḥrayn from ‘Umar Bin Al-Khaṭ āb To Hārūn Al-Rashīd*, debates the possibility of the Byzantine-Najrānite Christians relationship being behind ‘Umar’s decision.

It is noticeable that El-Wakil doubts the authenticity of Muslim sources and mentions the fact that the prohibition of usury (*Ribā*) is not recorded in the Christian versions of the two Prophetic covenants. Meanwhile, Fāyde and Lecker’s examinations mainly rely on several suggestions by Muslim historians, rather than linking this decision to the terms of established Prophetic policy towards the non-Muslims of Najrān. In total, despite the efforts of the three studies in the context of Caliph ‘Umar’s decision, a complete understanding of this context still needs more exploration in order to establish its justifications, subsequent consequences and relationship to the established Prophetic policy toward the non-Muslims of Najrān, as will be detailed in Chapter Six ( see subsection 6.5.6).

## **1.4 Conclusion**

As demonstrated above, there are a large number of sources, written in a number of different languages over many centuries. The Eastern Christian sources present valuable details in the field of Christianity, due to their interest in Najrān as a main centre of Christianity in South Arabia. A small number of them, as seen above, were contemporary with the period under study, and written by Syriac, Greek and Ethiopian authors before the 7<sup>th</sup> century CE. The usefulness of Christian sources in the present research concentrates on highlighting valuable details of the religious aspects of the Christian community, despite the fact that these details do not cover all aspects of the study questions.

The highest number of sources for the present research are clearly the Muslim ones. These examine different issues related to Najrān's history as a region of major interest to Muslim historians of Arabia during the pre- and early Islamic eras.

Despite the significant number of Christian and Muslim sources that are available, one noticeable problem is that most of them focus on the political aspects of the history of the religious communities, rather than outlining their religious contexts. The probable reason behind this is that these Christian and Muslim sources are based on recording the most important incidents in chronological order. This concentration obviously does not include information on the key themes of daily religious life, especially concerning theological beliefs and rituals of worship. The authenticity of the accounts of Christian and Muslim sources is another concern, as can be seen by the inclusion in these accounts of some legendary elements, as discussed earlier. The probable cause is the use of both Muslim and Christian sources of oral transmission rather than documentary material. It also may be because some Christian and Muslim historians recorded the history of Najrān from their own perspective, as elaborated previously.

In addition, archaeological and epigraphic material provides valuable and trustworthy information about polytheistic faiths, deities and practices of worship in Najrān and its surrounding regions. Information relevant to the current study is still scarce, especially the fields concerning Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

In general, it is clear that although the primary sources contain details about the political, economic and literary aspects of Najrānite society, only a small amount of information is written specifically on the subject of religion in Najrān. This may show the difficulty of finding enough information for a proper assessment of the main issues of religious life in Najrān at the time. Nonetheless, linking these questions to the surrounding regions probably provides a better understanding.

In the section on secondary sources, although a number of modern studies discuss topics related to the political, economic and cultural history of Najrān, little interest is paid to the topic of the religious structure of Najrān in terms of formation, development and changes to religious groups. In other words, although attention is paid to the arrival of the three religions – Judaism, Christianity and Islam – as well as some details on the relation between Christians and Jews of Najrān and Muslim authorities, it is mainly the political context of this arrival that is examined. More specifically, the interest in Christianity seems to focus on the arguable question of its arrival, places of worship and doctrines. This interest, however, does not sufficiently cover aspects of the religious

history of this community, such as the doctrinal development, theological concepts, rituals of worship and the clergy of the church. Even the discussion of places of worship and doctrines appears to be based on accounts that still need further investigation.

Although the arrival of Islam is presented through the above studies, the main focus is on the political situation, rather than on examining the impact of Islam on the religious structure of Najrān. It is true that there is some interest in aspects of the policy of Muslim authorities toward non-Muslims, and especially in the expulsion of Jews and Christians from the region, but there is a lack of focus on questioning the policies adopted with regard to propagating Islam, the existing non-Muslim communities and the ability to establish peaceful coexistence in Najrānite society.

As a result, there seems little in the above modern research that contributes directly to the subject of the present study. More clearly, the main hypothesis of this research, that Najrān represented a multi-religious structure, is not the focus of any previous studies. This points to the present study complementing other studies in the same area of research by examining new issues. In addition, answering research questions will perhaps lead to some practical recommendations that may be adopted as valid topics for research in the future.

## **Chapter 2**

### **The Background of Najrān**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

In order to fully investigate the religious structure of Najrān during the period under study, it is essential to establish a clear and comprehensive background of the region. This background consists of four main topics: geography, demography, economy and political history. The examination of these topics as factors may provide answers concerning the extent to which they contributed to the creation of the religious society of Najrān.

Another issue dealt with in this research is the lack of Western literature about the term “Najrān”, with the exception of limited attention in the academic fields detailed in Chapter One (see section 1.2). This may be attributable to Najrān’s location, in the southern Arabian Peninsula, and to the fact that this area holds limited interest for non-Arabic scholars, except for a small number who are specialists in pre-Islamic and early Islamic history. Therefore, a comprehensive background is provided, in order to give the reader a general understanding of the area of research before moving on to the main topic of this study.

#### **2.2 Geographical background of Najrān**

Najrān was the name given to an ancient city which is believed to have been located in the southwestern Arabian Peninsula (Shahīd, 2012). However, by the pre-Islamic period, the name Najrān had come to be applied to a large region located between Yemen, al-Sarāt, al-Ḥijāz and Najd. The geographic location of Najrān played an essential role in its assumption of an important position as a well-known centre of economic activity, a multi-religious society and a politically significant area of South Arabia. Hence, its location clearly contributed to the formation of the structure of its society as a multi-religious one. Therefore, it is necessary to consider certain aspects of this location in order to comprehend how its geography gives Najrān its important position. Three relevant factors are helpful in providing a clear understanding here: the topography of Najrān, the debate over the etymology of the area’s name, and the definition of Najrān’s location.

### 2.2.1 Topography

The region of Najrān lies at an altitude of around 8,000 feet (about 1,800 metres) above sea level (Ḥamzah, 1968, al-Ḥiwālī, 1982, al-Sharīf, 1984). More specifically, the area that is once known as the Najrān valley (*Wadī Najrān*) is bordered by several chains of mountains which surround it to the south, north and east. Large plains that are separated by a long valley are located between these mountains (Philby, 1952, Ḥamzah, 1968, al-Ḥiwālī, 1982, Ibn-Jrais, 2004). The areas lining both sides of the Najrān valley are mostly fertile and rich in water resources. Both these features enabled Najrān to be a centre for human settlement, as can be seen in the existence of around seventy villages in the valley at the advent of Islam, such as Raʿāsh, al-Mūfjah, al-Qāpil, Pūles, al-Ukhdūd, and Ḥuṣun, some of which still exist (al-Ḥiwālī, 1982).

Besides the valley of Najrān, there are other valleys, towns and Bedouin areas that are regarded as a part of the Najrān region (al-Sharīf, 1984, al-Hamdānī, 1989). One of these is the valley of Ḥabūnan, located in the north of Najrān. This valley runs parallel to the Najrān valley and then connects to it at the point marking the beginning of Remāl Ṣayhad (Empty Quarter Desert). The Ḥabūnan valley contains a large fertile area of land and water resources, and was similar to the Najrān valley in terms of the density of human settlement during the period under study.

Additionally, in the north of the region, within its boundaries, there are small towns such as Ḥabūnan, Badr, Yadamah and Thajr. Most of these small towns are located on the caravan route, which increased their commercial importance, as will be shown in the section on the economy.

The climate of Najrān is generally continental, which tends to be cold in winter and hot in summer (al-Sharīf, 1984, al-Murīḥ, 1992). However, its peak temperature in the summer is generally lower than in inland areas of Arabia, which are exposed to extreme heat during peak summer months (al-Sharīf, 1984). This can be noted by Najrān's average temperature statistics, which indicate that the summer temperature normally ranges from 16 to 32 degrees Celsius, and its approximate rainfall is around 110 millimeters, making it conducive to large-scale human settlement (al-Sharīf, 1984).

In general, although the topography of the Najrān region contains a range of terrains that are sometime rugged, this region has been an attractive place for human settlement since very early times, due to the availability of water resources and fertile land and an acceptable climate. As a result, the basic requirements for the establishment of an urban society and a flourishing economy were evidently in place.



### 2.2.2 The etymology

The word 'Najrān' has appeared in different types of source, mainly Muslim sources, inscriptions and Ancient Greek and Roman works. In Muslim sources, the region of Najrān is believed to have taken its name from the ancient Arab tribal leader Najrān bin (the son of) Zaid bin Ya'arub bin Qaḥṭān (Ibn-Khurradādhbih, 1889, al-Qazwīnī, 1960, al-Bakrī, 1983, al-Ḥamawī, 1995). These sources relate that this leader was the first person to settle in the valley of Najrān and that this area was therefore named in his honour. This suggestion is accepted by several recent researchers, such as al-Ḥiwālī (1982), al-Masrī (1992), al-'Amrī (2004), Ibn-Jrais (2004) and al-'Utaybī (2009). This is may be due to the fact that many cities and countries were named in this way, such as Alexandria in Egypt, and the Ḥaḍramūt and Hamdān provinces of Yemen. However, the documentary evidence to support this is non-existent, so epigraphic material maybe be helpful to shed light on this issue.

Najrān was first mentioned in ancient southern Arabian inscriptions around 680 BCE, when it was invaded by king Karib'il Watar (Philby, 1952, Bāfaqīh, 1985, al-'Amrī et al., 1990, Ali, 1993, al-Iryānī, 1990). Another inscription, dated the same year, refers to the victory of king Karib'il Watar over the kingdom of *Muhamir* in Najrān and the destruction of its city, *Ragmāt* or *Ragamāt* (al-'Utaybī, 2007, Schiettecatte, 2010). Scholars and archaeologists such as Philby (1952), Mahrān (1999), al-Ansary and al-Murīḥ (2003), and Arbach and Audouin (2007) agree that *Ragmāt* was probably the name of the capital of *Muhmair*, which later became the town centre of Najrān, which was later known as al-Ukhdūd. After this, Najrān was referred to in a number of inscriptions in view of its relations with ancient southern Arabian kingdoms such as Ma'īn, Sheba and Ḥimyar. Jamme (1962) and Schiettecatte (2010) recorded inscriptions, dating from the period between the fourth century BCE until the six century CE, that identify Najrān as a tribe, people, area, valley and country.

The reason for using the term 'Najrān' is not clear from these inscriptions, but it developed over time to become the name of the region. It appeared originally as the name of a small town, but certainly Najrān was a well-known region in the ancient history of South Arabia since early times, due to its economic and political importance, as will be discussed in this chapter (section 2.4).

The references to Najrān in Ancient Greek and Roman sources present it as an important southern Arabian city. Pliny (1855)<sup>23</sup> and Strabo (1892)<sup>24</sup> mentioned the city of *Negrana* in view of their discussion on the Roman military campaign led by Aelius Gallus against South Arabia in 24 BCE, while Ptolemy<sup>25</sup> referred to Najrān as the *Negara Metropolis* (Ali, 1993).

These names in the Greek and Roman sources are most probably derived from the original Arabic term Najrān, and thus may reflect the importance of Najrān as one of the main commercial centres in South Arabia, where the caravans of spices and incense stopped, as will be discussed in detail in the section 2.4.

In summary, it can be concluded that the term ‘Najrān’ is an old name that developed over time to become the name of a large region during the period under study.

### 2.2.3 Location

Muslim geographers have often debated about which part of Arabia Najrān was located within. They were divided into two schools of thought regarding this issue. The first group believed that Najrān was regarded as part of Yemen. For example, al-Hamdānī (1989) suggests that the valley of Najrān is located in the middle of Yemen, and al-Qazwīnī (1960) and al-Ḥamawī (1995) considered Najrān one of the *Makhālīf al-Yaman* (regions of Yemen). Similarly, a number of Muslim linguists and geographers, such as al-Ya‘qūbī (1860), Ibn-Ḥawqal (1938), Ibn-Sa‘īd (1970), al-Rāzī (1985), Ibn-Manzūr (1994) and Ibn Faḍl Allāh al-‘Umarī (2002), support this suggestion by classifying Najrān as one of the main regions of Yemen.

Conversely, the second group argues that Najrān was situated in the region of al-Ḥijāz. A number of Muslim scholars, such as Ibn-Khurradādhbih (1889), Ibn-Rustah (1891), al-Maqdisī (1909), al-Fākihī (1994) and al-Ḥāzimī (1995), considered Najrān to be one of the plateau regions of Mecca (*Makhālīf Makkah fi Najd*). In a different classification, al-Bakrī (1983) described Najrān as a city in al-Ḥijāz, near to Yemen.

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23 Pliny the Elder or Plinius was a Roman author, historian and geographer who lived in the first century CE and was the author of the *Natural History* (Sallmann, 2006).

24 He was a Greek philosopher and geographer, who lived 64/63 BCE - 24 CE (Radt and Elvers, 2006).

25 Claudius Ptolemy, or Baṭlamīyūs in Arabic, is Greek mathematician, astronomer and geographer from Egypt, he lived in the second century CE and died around 170 CE in Alexandria (Manfred, 2011).

Current research sheds light on this issue. al-Ḥiwālī (1982), al-Medej (1983), and al-Masrī (1992) consider Najrān to be one of the main regions of Yemen. The Yemenite historian al-Shujā‘ (1987) suggests that Najrān can be regarded as a city near al-Ḥijāz, on the border of Yemen. This opinion seems a valuable assessment, in contrast to al-Masrī’s view, as ancient maps show Najrān located between Yemen to the south and west, al-Ḥijāz to the north and the Empty Quarter Desert to the east (see Appendix 3: Maps 1 and 2). However, the assessments of all four scholars’ adoption seem to be based on geographical aspects only, rather than considering the political factors involved in the period under study.

The reason for the disagreement between these Muslim scholars has not yet been revealed, but is probably due to two main factors. First, the majority of such Muslim geographers and scholars did not travel to South Arabia and seemingly relied on oral accounts, rather than examining the geography of Najrān by visiting its location. Only al-Hamdānī visited Najrān and furnished valuable details concerning its geographical context.

Second, their works should be evaluated in light of current political and administrative influence. These scholars were probably affected by political conditions in Yemen and al-Ḥijāz, identifying the geographical features in light of political power struggles that were current at their own time, as can be assumed in the case of al-Hamdānī, who lived when Yemen enjoyed a relative political independence from the influence of the ‘Abbāsīd Caliphate (al-Hamdānī, 1989). However, the political affiliation of the Najrān region appears to have been unstable during the time under discussion. Thus, its geographical status depended on the influence of main neighbouring powers. More clearly, as will be seen in the current study, Najrān occasionally subordinated to the influence of the Abyssinian governor in Ṣan‘ā at the beginning of the period under study (525-571 CE), but it enjoyed relative autonomy towards the end of the pre-Islamic period (Shahīd, 1979, Ibrāhīm, 2007). Under Islam, the Prophet Muḥammad arranged Najrān as a detached region, subordinated directly to Medina, the capital of the Muslim state, but in the period of the Rashidun Caliphate, it was a part of the administrative responsibilities of the resident governor of al-Ṭā’if (al-Maqdisī, n.d., al-Ṭabarī, 1987). This provides obvious evidence to assume that the geographical labelling of Najrān depends on the political power balance in the region.

## 2.3 Demography

The demographic structure of the region of Najrān has been given attention in modern research. al-Shujā‘ (1987) and Ibn-Jrais (2004) mainly relied on al-Hamdānī’s account to describe the population of Najrān (al-Hamdānī, 1989). This account reports that the major tribes of Hamdān, Banū Yām, Wād‘ā and Banū Shākr, settled in Najrān, in addition to the tribe of Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b, who were the most powerful tribe in the region. More recently, al-Zūwayd (2013) claims that other tribes, such as the Murād, Ṣuda’, Jurm and Nahd, also settled within the boundaries of the Najrān region. In fact, al-Hamdānī’s account appears to describe the demography of Najrān in his lifetime between the ninth and tenth centuries CE, rather than the period under research, which was earlier. Thus, the demography of the districts of the Najrān region during the pre-Islamic and early Islamic periods evidently differed from al-Hamdānī’s account.

Early Muslim historians who shed light on the settlement of Arab tribes did not refer to al-Hamdānī’s account in the tribal list for Najrān during the period under study. The historians al-Aṣma‘ī (1959) and al-Khuzā‘ī (1997) claimed that Najrān was settled first by groups of the Banū Iram bin Sām bin Nūḥ, before they were evicted by the Banū Madhḥidj in ancient times. Meanwhile, Ibn-Ḥabīb (1942), Ibn-Khaldūn (1984) and al-Ṭabarī (1987) related that the Banū al-Afa‘ā bin Jurham was the first tribe to rule Najrān, before the coming of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b to Najrān. Another account reported by al-Ya‘qūbī (1883), Ibn-Khaldūn (1984) and al-Mas‘ūdī (2005) related how the al-Azd tribes wanted to reside in Najrān after breaching the Ma‘arib dam, but were fought off by the Banū Madhḥidj and emigrated to different areas.

Early southern Arabian inscriptions do not include obvious references to these other tribes (Jamme, 1962, al-Iryānī, 1990, Kitchen, 2000). Therefore, the mention of the area’s settlement by the Banū Iram bin Sām and Banū al-Afa‘ā bin Jurham perhaps reflects the early interest of southern Arabian tribes in this region, rather than actual settlement, because this mention clearly relied on oral tradition. Although previous historians agreed that the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b tribe began to control most of the districts in the Najrān region, the problem is that there is no answer as to the approximate date this tribe settled in the region. To answer this question, the northern Arabian al-Namārah inscription, which dates to 328 CE, directly indicates that the Madhḥidj tribes were the people who lived around Najrān. More clearly, in the same period, another southern Arabian inscription records that the well-known Ḥimyarite king Shammar Yahri’s sent a military campaign against “*Ḥārītān bin Ka‘bm*”, most likely the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b (Jamme, 1962).

From the above, the valuable inscriptions provide clear evidence to presume that the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Kaʿb tribe was probably the major tribal power in Najrān since the fourth century CE at least. Also, the attempts by the al-Azd to settle in Najrān is most probably close to reality, because the consequences of the al-Azd emigration were still being felt during the early Islamic period, due to the spread of the main tribes of this Yemenite group across the Arabian Peninsula during the period under study. This story perhaps also provides evidence that the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Kaʿb tribe was the dominant tribe in the region during this period.

In the sixth century CE, mentions of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Kaʿb become more frequent through Muslim sources, as the tribe who controlled most districts in the Najrān region, under the grand chieftdom of the house of Banū ad-Dayyān (al-Qālī, 1978, al-Bakrī, 1983, al-Ḥamawī, 1995, al-Iṣfahānī, 1997). However, it is apparent that there were additional groups that lived in Najrān, in addition to the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Kaʿb tribe. The examination of this suggestion would lead to a reconsidering of the tribal map of Najrān on the eve of Islam.

Muslim sources recount that the relationships between Islam in Medina and Najrān agree that the Prophet Muḥammad contacted only two main groups among the region's population: the Christian community and the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Kaʿb tribe (Ibn-Saʿad, n.d., al-Yaʿqūbī, 1883, al-Bayhaqī, 1988). This clearly implies that the two groups formed the majority of the region's population at that time.

The Christian community seem to have settled the rural areas that include the town centre and the villages of the valley of Najrān (al-Bayhaqī, 1988, al-Iṣfahānī, 1997). Most Christians were Arabs from different tribes, such as the Madhhidj, Ḥimyar, al-Azd, Kinda, Hamdān, Qhuḍā'a, Banū Bakr bin Wā'il and Banū Iyād. This can be seen in the members of the Christian delegation from Najrān that went to meet the Prophet Muḥammad in Medina (al-Yaʿqūbī, 1883, al-Bayhaqī, 1988). It can be also noted in Muslim sources on genealogy that several Arab Christian clerics were consecrated as bishops of Najrān, as will be explained in Chapter Five (see section 5.6) (Ibn-Ḥazm, 1948, Ibn al-Kalbī, 1988, Ibn-Durayd, 1991). The reason behind this multiplicity of tribes was most likely to have been due to the economic importance of Najrān as an industrial centre and an open market

located on the caravan route. This can be observed in the visits of Najrānite Christian traders to Mecca and Yathrib<sup>26</sup> for commercial purposes (Ibn-Hishām, 1955).

The Banū al-Ḥārith bin Kaʿb tribe was descended from the Madhḥidj (*Mālik*), a Yemenite tribe (Ibn-Ḥazm, 1948, Ibn al-Kalbī, 1988). It was divided into several clans, such as the Banū Ziyād, Banū an-Nār, Banū Muʿāwiyah, Banū Qinān and Banū Ḥimās, and their grand chieftainship was held by the house of Banū ad-Dayyān (Ibn al-Kalbī, 1988, Ibn-Durayd, 1991).<sup>27</sup> The majority of these tribal clans lived in Bedouin areas, including the Ḥabūnan valley, while other clans of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Kaʿb settled in the valley of Najrān (Ibn-Saʿad, n.d., al-Yaʿqūbī, 1883, al-Iṣfahānī, 1997). The Prophet Muḥammad's covenants with the chieftains of the major clans of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Kaʿb provide helpful details which enable a possible map to be drawn of the lands of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Kaʿb (Ibn-Saʿad, n.d.). These covenants indicate several places, most probably located in the Bedouin areas of the Najrān region. They also refer to the protection of grazing lands and livestock in return for paying *Zakāh* (see Appendix 1).

Most Bedouins of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Kaʿb were probably polytheists who worshipped pre-Islamic idols and other mixed beliefs, as will be discussed in detail in the next chapter. However, the majority of those who lived in the town centre and rural areas, especially in the Najrān valley, appear to have been Christians, except for a minority who had converted to Judaism earlier (al-Yaʿqūbī, 1883, Ibn-Ḥabīb, 1942, Ibn-Qūṭaybah, 1981, al-Ḥimyarī, 1985).

The Jewish community, both Ḥārithīs and non-Ḥārithīs, were probably small in number compared to the Christian community and the polytheists of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Kaʿb (Ibn-Jaʿfar, 1981, al-Balādhurī, 1987). The population of this community was probably concentrated in the town centre and surrounding rural areas, due to their involvement in economic activities, especially in trade and finance (Ibn-Ḥabīb, 1985).

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26 Yathrib is the old name of the Medina city where the Prophet Muḥammad mosque exists in the west of Saudi Arabia today. This city was a well-known centre of commerce, industry and agriculture during the pre-Islamic era. When the Prophet Muḥammad emigrated to Yathrib, he took it as the first capital of Muslim state and changed its name to Medina or al-Madīnah al-Munawwarah which can mean the radiant city (al-Samhūdī, 1972, al-Ḥamawī, 1995, Newby, 2002, Campo, 2009, Schöller, 2016).

27 According to al-Hamdānī (1978) and al-Ḥimyarī (1999), the founder of this leading family was ad-Dayyān bin Qutn al-Ḥārithī, who was considered to be the general commander of the Madhḥidj tribes against the Banū Rabiʿah in the reign of the Ḥimyarite king Tubbʿ Asʿad Abū Kariba during the early decades of the fifth century CE.

In addition to the Arab population, the open market of Najrān made it an attractive centre for other non-Arabs, probably including Persians, Byzantines and Ethiopians. Most of these would have come to work in commerce, industry and banking. The Persian community (*al-Abnā'*), who were mostly Zoroastrians (*Majūs*), formed a small group within Najrānite society at the advent of Islam (al-Hamdānī, 2004b). Muslim sources provide little information about a few families of Persian Zoroastrians who converted to Islam, such as Banū al-Baylāmnī and Banū Ḥūrrah (al-Mizzī, 1980a, al-Hamdānī, 1989, Ibn-Khayyāt, 1993, al-Hamdānī, 2004b). Moreover, al-Hamdānī (2009), in another work, spoke of small groups of Zoroastrians who worked in mineral extraction and had temples devoted to fire worship since the early times of Islam.

Overall, the population of the Najrān region seems to have consisted of two major groups: the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka'b, who were mostly polytheists, and the Christian community. However, this population was a multi-religious society, due to the existence of other religious communities, especially Jews and Zoroastrians.

## **2.4 Economy**

Shahīd (2012) considers geographical location as a major factor behind Najrān becoming a thriving centre of economic activities such as industry, trade and cultivation during the sixth and seventh centuries CE. He observes that the city's importance was "as a caravan city" as it was "located at the intersection of two main caravan routes, one that ran from Ḥaḍramūt through al-Ḥijāz to the eastern Mediterranean, and another that ran to the northeast through Yamāma into Mesopotamia".

In fact, the flourishing of these economic activities cannot be linked to geographical location alone. There were two basic factors that contributed to the development of the economy of Najrān. It has been already explained that the Najrān valley was rich in water and fertile agricultural land. This can be assumed to be the first factor, because it led to the establishment of agriculture as one of the main activities in the region during the time under study. As physical evidence, archaeologists working in the town of al-Ukhdūd reported finding the remnants of irrigation canals that covered a large area of agricultural land in the main valley of Najrān (Zarins et al., 1981). These archaeological remnants show how the practice of agriculture developed by adopting an advanced system of irrigation. The Najrānites' practice of agriculture would not have included such an advanced system without great interest in it as a major part of their economy.

This activity did not escape the attention of Muslim sources, as can be seen in the Prophet's decree to his first governor of Najrān, 'Amr bin Ḥazm, which points to the collection of *Zakāh* from two types of agricultural land: land watered by rain and land watered by irrigation (Ibn-Hishām, 1955, al-Ṭabarī, 1987). In more detail, al-Hamdānī (1989) reported on the agricultural products of Najrān on several occasions, mentioning the quality of its dates, citron, sugar, wheat, sesame and corn. This account states that most of these products were exported to the markets of Yemen, al-Ḥijāz, Najd and Mesopotamia.

These sources provide clear evidence of the extent to which agriculture flourished in Najrān, especially in the fertile areas located in the Najrān valley. The existence of around seventy villages there is further clear evidence for assuming that agriculture was widely practised by the Najrānites (al-Bayhaqī, 1988). Therefore, the flourishing of agriculture was an attractive factor for Christians and Jews who made their home there.

The second factor is the development of grazing and ranching, in particular by people living in nomadic and Bedouin areas, during the period under study. These areas contained wide grazing lands and water resources, even though the desert climate was difficult. al-Hamdānī (1989) reported in detail that the people of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka'b tribe in Bedouin areas owned herds of livestock that used to graze across the nomadic lands surrounding Najrān. In addition, al-Hamdānī (1989) indicated the existence of a protected land that was allocated for grazing in the east of Najrān, called Ḥemā. Here, the protection of land for grazing purposes was accepted as a condition in the Prophet Muḥammad's covenants with the chieftains of the clans of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka'b tribe, in return for paying *Zakāh* for the livestock (Ibn-Sa'ad, n.d.).

These details provide a picture of grazing and ranching as a flourishing activity, in particular by Bedouin people who represented a significant number of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka'b. This can be seen in the wide extent of land and the number of water sources specifically for grazing, as al-Hamdānī shows. Most significantly, the protection of lands for grazing purposes seems to have been a common policy amongst the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka'b tribe in the pre-Islamic period. Under Islam, the Muslim authorities adopted this pre-Islamic policy for the same purpose. It is obvious that the flourishing of grazing and ranching, as suggested above, contributed to the development of other economic activities, such as industry or trade, by providing raw materials for their needs, such as leather.



In industry, Najrān was a well-known centre of the production of several types of industries items, such as tanned leather, textiles, pottery and minerals (Ibn-Ḥawqal, 1938, al-Idrīsī, 1989). Leather and textiles appeared as two of the most famous products from Najrān, due to the flourishing of ranching, and hence the availability of raw materials from animals (al-Iṣṭakhrī, 1927, al-Idrīsī, 1989). Muslim sources speak of Najrānite garments (*al-Ḥūlal al Najrāniyyat*) as the most important products of this industry (Ibn-Rustah, 1891, al-Hamdānī, 1989, Ibn-Manẓūr, 1994).

Pottery was perhaps the biggest industry, especially in the pre-Islamic period. Several archaeological missions have conducted significant research into historical sites across the region. The results of their research show that Najrān was a flourishing centre for the production of saucepans, cups, dishes, plates and censers. The material used to produce these pieces varied from clay and glass to metals such as bronze, silver and copper (al-Zahrānī et al., 2012).

This brings us to another industry, mineral extraction. The valuable account offered by al-Hamdānī (2009) refers to foreigners who were employed to extract iron, gold, silver and other metals from several mines in the region, particularly on the border of Ṣa‘dah<sup>28</sup> in the south, and on the main route to Yamāmah in the northeast. Al-Hamdānī’s account provides strong evidence to suggest that mineral extraction was established in Najrān as one of its main industries and positively influenced other industrial activities by providing raw materials. More significantly, the account of al-Hamdānī includes an indication that groups of foreign people, a number of them were Zoroastrians, worked in mineral extraction. These non-Najrānite people may have embraced different religions, which perhaps impacted the religious structure of Najrān.

Mineral extraction contributed to the establishment of Najrān as an important centre for the production of weapons such as swords, shields and spears. The covenant made by Prophet Muḥammad with the Christian delegation of Najrān contains direct references to these types of weapons (Abū-Yūsuf, 1962). Moreover, al-Hamdānī (1989) described how Najrānites produced their weapons from iron and copper. Both accounts show that weapon manufacturing existed in the Christian community of Najrān during the time under study.

The commercial importance of Najrān’s city centre developed until it was a central marketplace for trading commodities during the pre- and early-Islamic periods (al-Hamdānī, 1989, Ali, 1993, Ibn al-

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28 Ṣa‘da is a name of a region in the north of Yemen at the moment, its city took the same name when it was founded by the Zaydī imam al-Hadī ilā al-Ḥaqq in the last of the ninth century CE (al-Hamdānī, 1989, al-Ḥamawī, 1995).

Mujāwir, 1996). Three main factors contributed to the development of Najrān's marketplace. First, Najrān was regarded as a major station at the intersection of two caravan routes. The first route ran through the east of Arabia via al-Ḥijāz up to Syria, while the second crossed the middle of Arabia (*Najd*) to Mesopotamia (al-Ansary and al-Murīh, 2003, al-ʿAmrī, 2004).

The second factor that can be seen is the growth in the three main economic activities of agriculture, grazing and manufacturing, which required a commercial centre to market their products. The third factor can be seen in the work of a number of Najrānite people in trade between southern and northern Arabia. For instance, eastern Christian accounts speak of the Najrānite trader Ḥayyān, who travelled to Constantinople, the capital city of the Byzantine Empire, and to al-Ḥīra (*Ḥīrat al-Nuʿmān*), the Lakhmid kingdom's (*al-Manāthirah*) capital in Mesopotamia, to trade, before converting to Christianity, as will be discussed in Chapter Five (see section 5.2) (Ibn-Sulaymān, 1899, Scher, 1907). Furthermore, the Muslim historian al-Iṣbahānī (1986) spoke of commercial relationships between ʿAbdul Muṭṭalib Ibn-Hāshim, the Prophet Muḥammad's grandfather, and the bishop of Najrān, and Ibn-Ḥabīb (1985) narrated that some nobles of Mecca had a commercial partnership with a Jewish trader from Najrān.

Consequently, the city of Najrān developed into an important commercial centre in the Arabian Peninsula and an attractive place for diverse commodities and regional traders. This importance probably increased in the period following the end of the Abyssinian occupation because Najrān enjoyed relative stability under local rule, as will be explained in the next section. For the present study, this development played a noticeable role in shaping the religious structure of the population of Najrān as a multi-religious environment. As evidence of this, agriculture appears to have been popular among the Christian community who were centred in the villages of the Najrān valley. Other evidence can be seen in the manufacturing work that attracted foreign groups to live in Najrān, as mentioned in al-Hamdānī's statement concerning the existence of a Zoroastrian group. More clearly, the commercial importance of Najrān played a role in bringing Christianity to Najrān, as can be read in the story of the Najrānite trader Ḥayyān as mentioned above.

The growth of Najrān as a commercial centre led to its emergence as a financial one, in particular during the pre-Islamic era. As evidence of this, archaeological research provides useful details of Najrān as a centre for the production of several types of coin (al-Zahrani and Ghoniem, 2012). In the last decades before the emergence of Islam, there is detailed information to suggest that the Christians and Jews of Najrān practised accountancy and banking until the advent of Islam (Ibn-

Sa'ad, n.d., Ibn-Sallām, 1975, Ibn-Zanjawayh, 2006). It was reported that some Christians and Jews made loans on the provision that these were repaid at high levels of interest. This particular type of economy can be considered as a factor behind the Jewish presence in Najrān, because most Najrānite Jews worked in trade or banking. In total, the growth of such financial activities was most likely due to the development of other economic activities, especially commercial activities that had a need for currency.

In summary, Najrān emerged as one of the major southern Arabian economic centres, due to the importance of its geographical location on the caravan route and the growth of economic activities in industry, agriculture, finance and trade. Therefore, this area might have been considered an attractive meeting place for different religious communities who would have worked in these sectors.

## **2.5 Political history**

The pre-Islamic history of Najrān saw sequential stages of conflict and peace that shaped its religious character. During these stages, religion often played a central role.

### **2.5.1 Ancient period**

Muslim historians such as Ibn-Hishām (1979), al-Ḥimyarī (1987) and al-Hamdānī (2004b) claimed that the oldest date in Najrān's history was during the reign of the Queen of Sheba, Bilqīs, when she appointed al-Qulummas bin 'Amr, called Afa'ā Najrān, as the resident governor there, around the tenth century BCE. According to al-Ya'qūbī (1883), Ibn-Ḥabīb (1942) and Ibn-Durayd (1991), this governor may have been the first Arab judge of this era, and resolved the conflict between the sons of Nizār bin Ma'ād bin 'Adnān,<sup>29</sup> who disputed their father's legacy. Biblical and Qur'anic texts agree that the Queen of Sheba was a contemporary of King Solomon, known in Islam as the Prophet Suleiman (Kings 10:1, Chronicles 9:1-12, Matthew 12:42, Sūrat al-Naml 20-44). It is widely thought that King Solomon lived in the tenth century BCE, which gives an approximate date of his meeting with the southern Arabian Queen. Unfortunately, southern Arabian inscriptions do not provide details dating from this period, or from this meeting.

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<sup>29</sup> This person, Nizār bin Ma'd bin 'Adnān, is assumed by Muslims sources of genealogy to be a major ancestor of the northern Arab tribes (Ibn-Ḥazm 1948, Ibn al-Kalbī 1988, Levi Della Vida 2016).

According to these inscriptions, the political history of Najrān most likely began with the founding of Muḥamir, which was a small kingdom in Najrān in the seventh century BCE, as mentioned earlier (Philby, 1952, Bāfaḳīh, 1985, al-‘Amrī et al., 1990, al-Iryānī, 1990, Ali, 1993, Kitchen, 2000). The Shebaen king Karib’il Watar attacked this kingdom around 680 BCE (al-‘Uṭaybī, 2007, Schiettecatte, 2010). Though Karib’il Watar’s attack caused widespread destruction in the city, Najrān apparently survived, and began to regain some of its former glory in the decades following the attack.

Later, around 115 BCE, Najrān was invaded by the army of the Shebaen king El Sharih Yahdhib (*al-Shariḥ Yaḥṣbb*) (Jamme, 1962, Ali, 1993). According to the available inscriptions, Najrān rebelled against the Shebaen rule and was supported by the Abyssinians and the king of Ḥaḍramūt; consequently, El Sharih Yahdhib led his troops to besiege Najrān and ordered the looting and destruction of the city. Here, the mention of Abyssinians is significant, as it shows an external element in the history of Najrān. This reflects the increasing importance of Najrān as a location on the caravan route.

Najrān's growing importance as a commercial centre was highlighted by the Roman military campaign of Aelius Gallus in Yemen in 24 BCE, which occupied the city of Najrān (Pliny, 1855, Strabo, 1892, Ali, 1993, Hoyland, 2001). The campaign, aimed at gaining control over the lucrative caravan routes in the region, eventually ended in failure, but the occupation provides evidence of Najrān’s growing importance as a major station on these main trade routes.

From this, it is clear that Najrān was an important target for southern powers, probably because of its political and economic significance. Though it seems to have been politically unstable during that time, the strategic and commercial location of Najrān most probably increased, as can be seen by the interest of the Romans and Abyssinians in capturing it instead of cities in Yemen.

### **2.5.2 The Ḥimyarite and Abyssinian periods**

In the first quarter of the fourth century CE, Najrān is mentioned again. The northern Arabian inscription “al-Namārah” refers to king Imrū’ al-Qays ibn ‘Amr’s<sup>30</sup> invasion of Najrān, which was ruled by Shammar, king of Ma’d (Bellamy, 1985, Abulhab, 2011). The term Shammar would

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30 Imrū’ al-Qays ibn ‘Amr is regarded as the second ruler of the Lakhmid kingdom in Mesopotamia, and reigned between 295-328 CE (al-Iṣfahānī 1961).

appear to indicate the well-known Ḥimyarite king Shammar Yahri'sh, who reigned over large areas of land in South Arabia, including Najrān, at that time. The text of the inscription implies that Najrān was attacked by the northern Arabian king Imrū' al-Qays even though it was under Ḥimyarite rule.

During the early fifth century CE, a change took place in the religious structure of Najrān, when the Ḥimyarite king Tubb' Abū Kariba As'ad adopted Judaism as the official religion of his country, including Najrān, which was part of the Ḥimyarite kingdom at that time (al-Ya'qūbī, 1883, Ibn-Hishām, 1979, al-Mas'ūdī, 2005). There is not much information concerning the spread of Judaism across the region, but king Tubb's decision had a significant impact by establishing a Jewish community in the region.

Shortly after this, Christianity began to gain converts among the Najrānite people, probably from the middle of the fifth century CE onwards (Ibn-Sulaymān, 1899, Scher, 1907, Budge, 1928). In other words, Najrān became an attractive location for Christian missionary activities, especially by Byzantine and Abyssinian evangelists. The coming of Christianity brought another new element to the religious structure in the Najrānite society, and this became a cause of serious conflict.

Around 518 CE, the Christians of Najrān were persecuted by the Ḥimyarite Jewish king Dhū Nuwās, which resulted in serious consequences not only for Najrān, but for political and religious conditions in South Arabia. Eastern Christian sources, Muslim sources and southern Arabian inscriptions report this story with significant details. In Eastern Christian sources, the persecution of the Najrān Christians is mentioned by the use of phrases such as “the Martyrs of Najrān”, “the Martyr Aretha” and “the Ḥimyarite Martyrs” (Wright, 1882, Hamilton and Brooks, 1899, Brooks, 1900, Procopius and Dewing, 1914, Malalas, 1940, Ḥaddād, 2012). The original details of the Christian version can be derived from three main sources that seem to have been contemporaneous with the incident: *The Book of the Ḥimyarites* (Moberg, 1924), *The Two Letters of Simeon of Bêth Arshām* (Hamilton and Brooks, 1899, Ya'qūb, 1966, Shahīd, 1971) and *The Martyrdom of Aretha* (Ibrāhīm, 2007). These sources agree on the events of the persecution itself, but *The Book of the Ḥimyarites* alone speaks of events preceding this incident. It tells how the Ḥimyarite king Masrūq (Dhū Nuwās) accused the Christians of Najrān of rebelling against his rule by supporting Abyssinia, and in another place in the book there is an important statement concerning the burning of Jewish synagogues before the invasion by that Ḥimyarite king.

These statements reflect the Jewish-Christian tensions that preceded the persecution of the Najrānite Christians. It is true that religion was present as a justification for the Ḥimyarite Jewish king's invasion, but the political factor appears to be an equally important reason here. More clearly, Najrān had become a centre of Christian influence, represented by its considerable population of Abyssinians, and probably Byzantines, who were the enemies of the Ḥimyarite king. Therefore, it is possible that the Ḥimyarite king took advantage of Jewish-Christian tensions to invade Najrān. Christian sources agree that the Ḥimyarite king commanded a large army, most whose members were Jews and polytheists, and besieged the city of Najrān for about two months before occupying it (Moberg, 1924, Shahīd, 1971). These sources talk of the destruction of places of worship and the arrest of large numbers of clergymen, female ascetics and Christians. The Ḥimyarite king ordered these Christians to abandon their religion and convert to Judaism, but they refused, and the king then ordered his troops to execute them by burning them inside the central church. The three Christian sources also speak of a conversation between the Ḥimyarite king and the leader of the Christian community, Saint Aretha, known in Arabic al-Ḥārith bin Ka'b (Ibrāhīm, 2007).

Although the overall context of the Christian version is generally accepted, there seems to be confusion over the identity of the two main characters. First, the mention of the Najrānite Christian leader al-Ḥārith bin Ka'b is worth discussing here. This was the name of the largest tribal power in the region during the period under study, as explained earlier (section 2.3). Furthermore, a number of Muslim sources of genealogy and history talk of al-Ḥārith bin Ka'b as a pre-Islamic character, but his lifetime was most likely earlier than the period under study (Ibn-Ḥazm, 1948, al-Sijistānī, 1961, Ibn al-Kalbī, 1988). Therefore, this term may refer to a Christian leader attributed to the tribe of Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka'b, rather than an actual name, Aretha, as Christian sources claimed previously.

Second, there is no agreement on the name of the Ḥimyarite king in the above sources. *The Martyrdom of Aretha* names the Jewish king as Dinḥās, while *The Book of the Ḥimyarites* and *The Two Letters of Simeon of Bēth Arshām* call him Masrūq. Procopius and Dewing (1914) used the term *Dounaas* for the Ḥimyarite king, which most likely refers to the term Dhū Nuwās, as Muslim sources stated. Ali (1993) suggests that the confusion over the name of the Ḥimyarite king may be due to distortion in copying the original name.

Muslim sources are clearer in their identification of the Ḥimyarite king. According to historians such as Ibn-Ḥazm (1948), Ibn-Khaldūn (1984), Ibn al-Kalbī (1988) and Ibn al-Athīr (1994), the

Ḥimyarite king Zur‘at bin Tubān, called Dhū Nuwās, converted to Judaism and took the name Yūsuf. This Jewish king then led a great military campaign against Najrān because its people were largely Christian. Historians such as al-Ya‘qūbī (1883), Ibn-Hishām (1955), al-Azraqī (1965), Ibn-Qūṭaybah (1981) and al-Ṭabarī (1987) related how the Jewish king tried to force the Christian leader, ‘Abdullah ibn al-Thāmir, to abandon Christianity, but he refused and the king gave orders to execute him in the presence of Najrān’s people. According to these historians, the execution of ‘Abdullah ibn al-Thāmir caused more people to convert to Christianity, which angered the Ḥimyarite king, who ordered his troops to dig trenches and put the Christians to death in these trenches by fire.

Most significantly, among most Muslim sources the persecution of Najrān’s Christians is regularly recounted in the light of the Qur’anic context of *Aṣḥāb al-Ukhdūd* because of the execution of the believers in trenches ordered by the persecuting king. More clearly, the Qur’anic text says: “The people of the pit were destroyed, while they sat around it, and were witnessing what they (who persecuted) did to the believers. Against these they had no grudge except that they believed in Allah, the Most Mighty, the Most Praiseworthy” (Sūrat of Burūj, verses 4-9). These verses do not include direct references to the specific place of this incident or the identity of the believers, whether they were Christians or not; it simply regards the persecuted people as martyrs. This is not uncommon, as the Qur’an is not a historical work, as can be seen in the Surah of the Elephant (*Sūrat al-Fīl*), which is largely accepted as a record of the Abyssinian invasion of Mecca in around 571 CE (Mahrān, 1988).

The Ḥimyarite invasion of Najrān is recorded by three southern Arabian inscriptions: two are located in the east of Najrān, in Ābār Ḥamā, and the third is located at the al-Kawkab Mountain to the northeast (al-Ḥazmī, 2011). The three inscriptions refer to a great military campaign sent by king Yūsuf As’ar Yath’ar against Najrān (Hoyland, 2001, Robin, 2015). This campaign consisted of Bedouin troops such as the Madhḥidj, Kinda, Hamdān and Murād, which were commanded by one of his tribal leaders, Sharḥabīl Dhū Yazan. The Ḥimyarite campaign defeated Najrān and destroyed its churches, killing over 12,500 people and capturing around 11,000.

It is noticeable that the three inscriptions are clearly in agreement with the Muslim version by identifying the Ḥimyarite king by the name Yūsuf. More importantly, the inscriptions agree with the Christian and Muslim versions concerning the context of the widespread execution of the Christians of Najrān. Noticeably, these executions reflect a serious attempt to change the religious

structure of the region by enabling Judaism to be the religion of the majority, instead of Christianity. This attempt was most probably unsuccessful in achieving its purpose. Instead, it led to the Abyssinian intervention that resulted in the kingdom of Ḥimyar coming under Abyssinian occupation. In other words, the persecution of Najrān's Christians caused a fierce reaction in the Christian world at that time.

*The Two Letters of Simeon of Bēth Arshām* (Hamilton and Brooks, 1899, Ya'qūb, 1966, Shahīd, 1971) tell how the bishop Simeon received witnesses who survived the persecution and recorded their reports, describing the different types of torment to which the Najrānite Christians were subjected. He then wrote a letter to Timotheus, the Patriarch of Alexandria, asking him to rescue the Christians of Najrān. Furthermore, *The Martyrdom of Aretha* (Ibrāhīm, 2007) states that the news of the persecution of the Christians of Najrān reached the Byzantine Emperor, Justin I, who wrote another letter to Patriarch Timotheus, asking him to persuade the Abyssinian king to intervene in Najrān. Both sources agree that the Patriarch dispatched his archbishop, Euprepios, to meet Kālēb, the king of Abyssinia (Elesbaas in *The Martyrdom of Aretha* and *The Acts of Gregentios*). King Kālēb led a great campaign that crossed the Red Sea (*Baḥr al-Qulzum*) around 525 CE and defeated the Ḥimyarite army, later killing the Ḥimyarite king. Christian sources affirm that the Abyssinian troops reached Najrān, restored its central churches and built an additional two churches (Moberg, 1924, Budge, 1928), (Michael the Syrian, 1996, Berger, 2006, Ibrāhīm, 2007). More specifically, *The Martyrdom of Aretha* (Ibrāhīm, 2007) states that the king of Abyssinia, Kālēb, appointed the son of Aretha as the local ruler of Najrān and re-established the clergy of the Najrānite Church.

In Muslim sources, a Najrānite Christian called Daūs Dhū Tha'labān fled to Byzantium and reported to the Emperor how Najrān's Christians were being persecuted. The Emperor then wrote a letter to the Negus of Abyssinia (*al-Najashī*) to safeguard the position of Christianity in Najrān (Ibn-Hishām, 1955, al-Dīnawarī, 1960). Here, Muslim sources differ from the previous Christian sources regarding the arrival of the Abyssinian king Negus and his army in South Arabia. They agree that the Negus launched a military campaign into South Arabia, commanded by Aryāt, which defeated the Ḥimyarite troops and brought down their kingdom (Ibn-Hishām, 1955, al-Dīnawarī, 1960, al-Azraqī, 1965, al-Ṭabarī, 1987).

The above Christian and Muslim sources give a clear picture of how the persecution of the Christians of Najrān attracted serious attention throughout the Christian world. This makes it likely



that the religious factor was a direct reason for the Abyssinian military intervention against the Ḥimyarite kingdom. However, the Muslim version does not provide information concerning what occurred in Najrān after the Abyssinian invasion, unlike the Christian account, which provides a detailed answer to this question. It is evident that the Abyssinian invasion impacted on both the political and religious situation in the Najrān region. Politically, it helped the Christian community to re-establish itself as the most powerful community in the region, appointing a local leader of the Christian community who enjoyed the support of the Abyssinians, and probably later that of Byzantium. This means there was political leadership in the Christian community, which enjoyed a type of autonomy. For religion, the Abyssinians re-established the clergy of the church of Najrān by consecrating a new bishop and bringing in clerics, as will be discussed in detail in Chapter Five (see section 5.6). In total, the Abyssinian efforts contributed to making Najrān the centre of Christianity in South Arabia, because a significant number of Christians lived there.

With regard to Judaism, all previous Christian sources do not record Abyssinian actions against the Jews of Najrān, although it is possible that there were significant repercussions for them, given the ongoing Jewish-Christian conflict. Judaism seems to have continued to exist, but as a religious minority compared to both Christianity and polytheism.

During the rest of the Abyssinian occupation, the resident Abyssinian governor, Abraha (Abraham), expanded his influence to include many Arab tribes in Najd and al-Sarāt, as several inscriptions record (Ali, 1993, Robin, 2015). A little can be learned about the direct relationship between Abraha and the Christian community in Najrān. In this respect, Ibn-Ḥabīb (1985) provides a valuable account, reporting that Abraha spent a short time in Najrān during his military campaign, before marching on to Mecca. This account furnishes evidence that Najrān most likely remained under Abyssinian influence, although probably indirect, because the Christian community had already been granted political autonomy in appointing their own leader. In other words, the account of Ibn-Ḥabīb would have reflected the loyalty of the Christian community to the Abyssinian governor, rather than complete Abyssinian control over the region. Abyssinian influence remained in religion, because the doctrinal loyalty of both the Abyssinian and Najrānite Churches were to the Monophysitic Church (Michael the Syrian, 1996, Ibrāhīm, 2007).

The Abyssinian influence, however, appears not to have existed in the Bedouin districts where most clans of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka'b tribe had settled. Two main factors provide evidence for this suggestion. First, Christianity apparently did not spread to these areas; most of the Banū al-Ḥārith

bin Ka‘b Bedouins remained polytheists. Second, the house of Banū ad-Dayyān, the main chieftdom of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b tribe, began to establish itself as a local political power in the region during that time (al-Hamdānī, 1978, al-Iṣḫānī, 1997). There is no specific date for the rise of this family, but there are significant poems recorded by al-Hamdānī (1978) and al-Ḥimyarī (1999), claiming that ad-Dayyān bin Quṭn al-Ḥārithī was a general commander of the Madhḥidj tribes against the Banū Rabi‘ah in the reign of the Ḥimyarite king Tubb‘ As‘ad Abū Kariba. These poetic details seem to contain some exaggeration, particularly in dating the lifetime of ad-Dayyān bin Quṭn al-Ḥārith as being in the early decades of the fifth century CE. However, they offer evidence to presume that the house of Banū ad-Dayyān had begun to emerge as a local tribal power in Najrān during the Abyssinian period.

In sum, although the Abyssinian influence still existed, especially in religious affairs, Najrān probably began to enjoy some kind of political independence at that time.

### **2.5.3 Late pre-Islamic history**

After 571 CE, a Persian military campaign came to South Arabia to support the tribal leader Sayf ibn Dhī Yazan against the Abyssinians (Ibn-Hishām, 1955, al-Ṭabarī, 1987). This campaign ended the Abyssinian occupation and Sayf became a Ḥimyarite king, but shortly afterwards, perhaps around 597 CE, he was killed and most southern Arabian regions fell under direct Persian occupation. This sequence of events apparently affected the political conditions in the Najrān region which became more clearly known during this period. It can be seen in the increasing political independence of the two local powers in the region, the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b and the Christian community. According to al-Qālī (1978) and al-Iṣḫānī (1997), ‘Abd al-Madān ad-Dayyān was the general chieftain of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b tribe during the Abyssinian occupation. He established himself as the dominant power in Najrān, as can be seen by his commanding warriors of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b to invade neighbouring regions, such as Najd and al-Ḥijāz (al-Iṣḫānī, 1997, al-Hamdānī, 2004c). This shows the military power and political influence of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b, which had by this point extended beyond the Najrān region.

Although there is little available information on the Christian community, its autonomy seems to have increased, despite the collapse of the Abyssinian Christian influence in South Arabia. More specifically, the relationship between the political leadership of the Christian community and that of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b tribe created a military alliance (al-Iṣḫānī, 1997). The relationship

was cemented by the marriage of Yazīd bin ‘Abd al-Madān bin ad-Dayyān,<sup>31</sup> who became the chieftain of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b tribe, to the daughter of ‘Abdul Massīḥ bin Dāris al-Kindī,<sup>32</sup> the political leader of the Christian community (al-Iṣfahānī, 1997).

Despite there not being much information explaining the terms of this alliance, there are probable factors that can be suggested here. The Christian-Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b alliance seems to have been established to protect regional independence from the Persian threat. It was a partnership for the management of political, economic, security and religious issues that affected the people of the region. This resulted in the stabilisation of the political and security situation across the region and thus Najrānite society appears to have been multi-religious during this particular period. More importantly, the available sources do not provide any details reporting civil or inter-communal conflict in Najrānite society. This would seem to mean that the Christian-Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b alliance succeeded in bringing about peaceful coexistence, and the multi-religious population of Najrān were able to live together peacefully.

During this period, the power of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b seems to have increased, and they took control of the region. The available accounts tell how the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b began to invade other tribes outside Najrān, such as the Hawāzin in al-Ḥijāz, the Banū Tamīm and Banū ‘Āmir bin Ṣa‘ṣa‘ah in Najd and the Kinda tribe in Yemen (Jād al-Mawlā and Ibrāhīm, 1969, al-Ḥamawī, 1995, al-Iṣfahānī, 1997). They also formed tribal coalitions against their enemies, as can be seen from the battle of Fīf al-Rīḥ against the Banū ‘Āmir bin Ṣa‘ṣa‘ah, the battle of al-Kilāb al-Thānī against the Banū Tamīm and the battle of al-Razm against Murād (Ibn ‘Abd-Rabbih, 1965, Jād al-Mawlā and Ibrāhīm, 1969, Ibn al-Athīr, 1994). These details show how the political and military influence of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b increased to impact other neighbouring tribes around Najrān, whilst probably offering Najrān a fair degree of protection from external invasion.

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31 Yazīd bin ‘Abd al-Madān bin ad-Dayyān is considered one of the most important tribal leaders in Arabia during the early decades of the sixth century CE. He had relations with Ghassanid kings and headed the delegation of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b to announce their Islam to the Prophet Muḥammad in 10 AH/631 CE (Ibn-Sa‘ad n.d., al-Iṣfahānī 1997, Ibn al-Athīr 1997).

32 ‘Abdul Massīḥ bin Dāris al-Kindī was a Najrānite Christian noble and leader, referred to as al-‘Aqib, and one of the Najrānite Christian delegation to the Prophet Muḥammad, as will be detailed in Chapter Five (al-Ḥamawī 1995, al-Iṣfahānī 1997).

Najrān may not have been subjected to the Persian occupation that occurred in neighbouring southern regions. A valuable statement offered by al-Rāzī (1989) speaks of a tribal coalition led by the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Kaʿb against Bāthān, the Persian governor in Ṣanʿā, but the tribes of Hamdān stood with him and established a military coalition to defend their existence in Ṣanʿā. Piotrovskii (1987) regards this episode as evidence of how the Persian occupation was weak, and only extended to Ṣanʿā and its surrounding districts. It shows clearly that the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Kaʿb had become powerful enough to threaten the Persian presence in Ṣanʿā. However, the existence of the Persian influence near Najrān may have represented a serious threat to its tribal power, Banū al-Ḥārith bin Kaʿb, in the long term because of the Persian ambitions to control the caravan route. Therefore, Najrān perhaps sought external support to maintain its independence. This could have been offered by the Christian powers of Byzantium and its loyal Arab state, the kingdom of Ghassanids (*al-Ghasāsīnah*) in Syria. In this respect, al-Iṣfahānī (1997) talked of positive relationships between Yazīd bin ʿAbd al-Madān and the Ghassanid kings. This Ghassanid-Najrānite relationship was probably created to confront Persia, who was a common enemy of both.

In summary, Najrān apparently enjoyed political independence during the decades following the end of the Abyssinian occupation and prior to the arrival of Islam. This independence most likely established a stability and peace within the population of the region, as can be seen in its flourishing economy. This was probably reflected in the religious structure of the region, which seems to have been multi-religious, consisting of Christians, Jews, polytheists and Zoroastrians.

On the whole, it should be noted that although several Yemenite kings ruled Najrān for periods of time, and foreign occupations existed in many regions in South Arabia, Najrān can be seen as one of the independent regions that was often governed by local authorities.

## **2.6 Conclusion**

This chapter has made it clear that there were several factors that contributed to making the region of Najrān an attractive centre for several communities of different faiths. This region enjoyed an important geographical location, being central to the four provinces of the Arabian Peninsula: Yemen, al-Sarāt, al-Ḥijāz and Najd. The topography of Najrān consisted of rugged mountains, hills, sandy deserts and valleys, which, however, contained many fertile areas, grazing lands and sources of water. Therefore, Najrān had been an attractive place for human settlement for many centuries, as

can be seen by the mention of the word “Najrān” as early as the seventh century BCE. In other words, these geographical features contributed to the development of economic activities in industry, trade and agriculture, which gave Najrān its status as an important commercial centre.

The flourishing economy of Najrān attracted several Arab tribes and minorities of non-Arabs to live within the borders of the region. They were divided into two population types. There was an urban community in the town centre and rural population the villages of the Najrān valley. Both the urban community and rural population consisted of different religious groups, mainly Christians and Jews, and probably a small number of Zoroastrians. Most members of these groups worked in trade, industry, handicrafts and agriculture, which led to them becoming wealthy. Meanwhile, the second population group is the Bedouins of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b tribe, who settled across the Bedouin districts that surrounded the Najrān valley. Most of those Bedouins were probably polytheists, as were most other Arab tribes. Grazing and ranching seem to have been their most common economic activities.

Significantly, the flourishing of its economy, and its geographical location, positively reflected on the importance of Najrān and made it a central marketplace location on the caravan route. That substantially impacted on its political situation, as can be seen from the outline of its political history up until the advent of Islam. More clearly, Najrān experienced conflicts and periods of peace, either between local powers or international and regional powers, as can be seen in the Ḥimyarite-Abyssinian conflicts and Byzantine-Persian competition. Such conflicts played a serious role in shaping the religious structure of the region, as can be presumed from the adoption of Judaism by the Ḥimyarites and the support for Christianity by both Byzantium and Abyssinia. The political independence of Najrān in the period immediately before the advent of Islam impacted on religious life in the region and its multi-religious society. This may have been due to the military alliance between the two main powers in the region: the political leadership of the Christian community and Banū ad-Dayyān, the main chiefdom of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b polytheists.

## Chapter 3

### Polytheism: Origins, Types, Gods, Beliefs and Rituals

#### 3.1 Introduction

Polytheism was the religion of a significant number of Najrānites, especially the Bedouins of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b, as mentioned in Chapter Two (see section 2.3). In the present study, it is essential to understand the exact meaning of polytheism in Najrān. The worship of idols seems to have been the most widespread form of faith among Najrānite polytheists during the period under study. It will also be suggested that Najrānite polytheism cannot be understood separately; in other words, without linking it to the historical context of polytheism in the Arabian Peninsula.

Dughaym (1995) and Hoyland (2001) agree that Arabian polytheism simply refers to faiths created by human beings, and includes the worship of idols, creatures, celestial bodies and other natural phenomena. Mir (2014) describes Arabian polytheism as the “belief in the existence of many deities alongside a supreme God”. Hawting (1999) assumes that Arabian polytheists did not reject Allah as the highest God, but they worshipped other deities as well as Him. These views evidently suggest that Arabian polytheism was based on the pluralism of worshipping more than one type of god or goddess, in addition to a belief in Allah as the highest God.

With regard to polytheism in Najrān specifically, Dā’ūd (1988) argues that the existence of Christian and Jewish communities may have had a significant impact on the concepts and rituals of worship amongst the polytheists of Najrān, mainly the theological concept of Allah, and the practice of prayer. This then raises question to whether Najrānite polytheists resembled other Arabs in their practices of worship, or whether they were influenced by Christian and Jewish practices, as Dā’ūd claims.

An answer to this question can be formulated in light of examining the main features of polytheism in Najrān, including its origins, types of idol, concept of Godhood, mixture of beliefs and rituals of worship.

### 3.2 The origins of polytheism

In order to understand what form polytheism took during the period under study, its historical development and the stages of its spread across the Arabian Peninsula should be traced as a whole. In this respect, it is well known that during the sixth and seventh centuries CE, until the advent of Islam, the majority of the Arabian population were polytheists, most of whom worshipped idols while others held mixed beliefs (Ibn al-Kalbī, 1924, Ibn-Ḥabīb, 1942, al-Shahrastānī, 1992). However, the exact date of the spread of polytheism throughout the Arabian Peninsula is not clear (Dā'ūd, 1988, Ali, 1993, Dughaym, 1995, Hawting, 1999). Here, three types of source are helpful in shedding light on this issue: Muslim sources, Qur'anic texts and inscriptions.

Muslim sources give two contradictory answers to this. First, a number of Muslim historians, such as al-Ya'qūbī (1883), Ibn al-Kalbī (1924) and al-Shahrastānī (1992), narrated that 'Amr ibn Luḥaī al-Khuzā'ī, the chieftain of the Khuzā'a tribe, who ruled Mecca before the Quraysh, was the first person to bring idols from Syria to Mecca. This was at a time when most Arabs had converted to *Ḥanifiyya*, which is known as *Dīn Ibrahīm* (the religion of the Prophet Abraham), and its worshippers were called *Aḥnāf*. This version relates that 'Amr ibn Luḥaī al-Khuzā'ī saw Syrian people praying to idols, and they told him that these idols were sources of power. He then requested the people of Syria to give him some of their idols, which they did, and 'Amr ibn Luḥaī al-Khuzā'ī brought them back to Mecca and set these idols up both inside and around the Ka'ba. According to this version, 'Amr ibn Luḥaī al-Khuzā'ī presented Yaghūth, one of his idols, to the tribes of Madhḥidj, who resided in the area between the towns of Jurash<sup>33</sup> and Ṣa'dah, which includes the Najrān region. The idol Yaghūth became the most popular god amongst the polytheists of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka'b in Najrān during the time under study (Ibn al-Kalbī, 1924, Ibn-Durayd, 1991). This led to conversions to other polytheistic faiths, including the worship of nature gods and goddesses, such as the sun, moon, stars, fire, stones and trees, amongst Arab tribes in the ages that followed. The worship of idols became the most widespread polytheistic religion throughout the Arabian Peninsula during the pre-Islamic period.

This version of the story brings up several problems: 'Amr ibn Luḥaī al-Khuzā'ī's lifetime is estimated to have been around 250 years before the birth of Prophet Muḥammad, the approximate

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33 Jurash was an ancient city, now located in the province of Assir in the south-west of Saudi Arabia (al-Hamdānī, 1989, al-Iṣṭakhrī, 1927).

date of the emigration of the Khuzā'a tribe to Mecca after the breaching of the Ma'rib Dam in the third century CE (Ali, 1993, Dughaym, 1995). This estimated date would be too late for Quranic texts and epigraphic research, both of which offer evidence that polytheism had appeared centuries before this date, most likely before the birth of Jesus Christ.

In addition, 'Amr ibn Luḥaī al-Khuzā'ī is noticeably mentioned in relation to a famous *Ḥadīth* said by the Prophet Muḥammad. This *Ḥadīth* mentions 'Amr ibn Luḥaī al-Khuzā'ī as being the first person who brought idols to Mecca, and made significant changes to the religion of Abraham by creating new rituals that were not known before (Ibn-Ḥanbal, 1969, al-Bukhārī, 1997, Muslim, 2007). Here, there is possibly a misinterpretation of the *Ḥadīth*, because its original text simply refers to 'Amr ibn Luḥaī al-Khuzā'ī as the first person who brought idols to the Ka'ba and created new polytheistic rituals, not as the founder of polytheism, as this version's narrators claimed. Therefore, the most probable interpretation is that 'Amr ibn Luḥaī al-Khuzā'ī may have played a significant role in developing Arabian polytheism by adopting idol worship, instead of the primary deities that the Arabs used to believe in before he appeared. In particular, this development can be assumed to be connected to the transition of the Najrānite polytheists from worshipping the god Dhū-Samawī, to worshipping Yaghūth, as most Arabian people did.

The same Muslim historians reported a second version that the Banū Ismā'īl (the offspring of Ishmael)<sup>34</sup> increased greatly in number in Mecca and came into conflict with their neighbours, the Banū Jurhum tribe. The Banū Ismā'īl then began to emigrate from Mecca to other Arabian provinces, but most of them made sure that they did not leave Mecca without taking a piece of stones (*Ḥejārah*) as a sign of their reverence and veneration for the place. Over the course of time, the Banū Ismā'īl began to worship these stones, and later replaced the worship of Allah with a conversion to polytheistic beliefs, even though these Arabs practised some Abrahamic religious beliefs,<sup>35</sup> particularly the Ḥajj (great pilgrimage) and its rituals (Ibn al-Kalbī, 1924, al-Azraqī, 1965, al-Shahrastānī, 1992). At this point, polytheism began to spread across the provinces of the Arabian Peninsula, including the area of interest to the current study.

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34 This is the traditional name for the northern Arabs. Ishmael Ibn Ibrahim, who is presented in Islam as the Prophet Ismā'īl, lived in Mecca and built the Ka'ba with his father, the Prophet Abraham. He is also the ancestor of the northern Arabs (Firestone, n.d.).

35 The term "Abrahamic religion" refers to the family of monotheistic religions that includes Judaism, Christianity and Islam, but it also includes the ancient religion of Abraham, as the three modern religions agree it is the original (Adel-Theodor, 2011).



Although this version seems to rely on oral tradition rather than documentary material, it established a logical background for the development of polytheism. It implies that the spread of polytheism was a largely a predictable consequence of the distortion of the *Ḥanifiyya* over the course of time. This is very possible, for two reasons: one is the fact that a small number of followers of *Ḥanifiyya* remained until the time of the Prophet Muḥammad, adopting the concept of Allah as the highest and the only God, and refusing aspects of polytheism, especially the worship of idols (Ibn-Hishām, 1955, al-Qurṭubī, 1964, al-Ṭabarī, 1995). This means that *Ḥanifiyya* clearly had roots in the distant past. Secondly, most Arabian societies existed in a state of religious and civilisational illiteracy during the long period between the Abrahamic era and the advent of Islam. This illiteracy may have involved changes in religious thought among Arabian societies, as may be suggested by their adoption of new types of worship.

Interestingly, the Banū Ismāʿīl version of the story dates the origins of polytheism back to a very early time, unlike the ʿAmr ibn Luḥaī al-Khuzāʿī version. This is significant because it speaks of a primary stage of polytheism that appeared as the adoption of the worship of stones, a simple form of polytheism, before the coming of idols. However, this version of the story lacks many features, such as the deities' kinds, types of ritual and the approximate date of the spread of polytheism among the Arabs.

This leads the discussion to the archaeological discoveries that have been made in several sites across the region of Najrān, such as al-Ukhdūd, Ḥemā, the al-Kawkab Mountain and other archaeological sites, over the past eight decades (Philby, 1952, Zarins et al., 1982, al-Iryānī, 1990, al-Zahrānī et al., 2005, Bin Tairan, 2005, Arbach and Audouin, 2007, Arbach et al., 2008). These discoveries show that the worship of celestial bodies existed in Najrān, particularly before the Shebaen period, as the oldest type of polytheism, most probably before the seventh century BCE. More clearly, a number of studies, such as those by Bin Tairan (2005), Arbach et al. (2008) and al-Zahrānī et al. (2012), speak of Dhū-Samawī as the main god of the ancient Najrānite polytheists during the time of the Muḥamir kingdom, before the seventh century BCE. Meanwhile, other studies confirm that the well-known southern god ʿAthtar was worshipped amongst Najrānites as the Venus deity (Zarins et al., 1982, Kibāwī et al., 1996, al-Ḥazmī, 2011, al-Zahrānī et al., 2012, al-Khudair, 2012). In addition, archaeological discoveries confirm that the inscriptions of al-Ukhdūd refer to the worship of the Moon deity by the term al-Maqah (Arbach et al., 2008, Fisher et al., 2015). Furthermore, according to Philby's discoveries, the ancient polytheists of Najrān would have

worshipped al-Shams, the Sun, which was one of the most sacred deities in ancient South Arabia (Philby and Tritton, 1944, Philby, 1952).

Archaeological research in al-Ukhūd has also recorded minor deities that seem to have been worshipped, such as Salmān, Mankth, Wadm, Kahl and Šlm (Philby and Tritton, 1944, Kibāwī et al., 1996, al-Zahrānī et al., 2005).

The above archaeological discoveries provide significant information about the early history of polytheism in the Najrān region. They clearly show that the worship of the three celestial bodies, the Sun, the Moon and Venus, which are together called the Holy Planetary Trinity, seems to have been the most worshipped deities amongst the ancient polytheists of Najrān. Despite the fact that there is no specific known time for the arrival of polytheism in Najrān, there are obvious references that this type of polytheism had been practised across the Najrān region since the seventh century BCE at least. The Holy Planetary Trinity is described as the most common form of worship in ancient southern Arabian polytheism (Bāfaqīh, 1985, Piotrovskii, 1987, al-‘Urayqī, 2002). This means that Najrān most likely did not differ from other southern Arabian regions in worshipping the three celestial bodies of the Sun, the Moon and Venus. The only difference here is the adoption of Dhū-Samawī as the major deity of the region’s people, while other southern Arabian regions had their own deities at this time.

The archaeological discoveries display considerable agreement with the Qur’anic text on the worship of celestial bodies in South Arabia. The Qur’an offers interesting details, which state that the people of Sheba worshipped the Sun (Sūrat al-Naml, verse 24). This Qur’anic text clearly refers to ancient polytheism in the Kingdom of Sheba, where Najrān had been located since the seventh century BCE, as mentioned earlier. For the present research, it provides a reference to worshipping the Sun, one of the main celestial bodies.

In total, the archaeological discoveries evidently agree with the Qur’anic statement and the second Muslim version, on the fact that the existence of polytheism in Najrān preceded ‘Amr ibn Luḥaī al-Khuzā‘ī by a long time. The above story, however, should not be excluded from the current discussion. It appears to have been a significant phase in the development of Arabian polytheism in structure and rituals, from the worship of celestial bodies to the worship of idols, as will be debated in this chapter.

### 3.3 Idols: gods and goddesses

A significant change seems to have occurred in the worship of the Holy Planetary Trinity of the Sun, the Moon and Venus among the polytheists of Najrān. This type of polytheism is likely to have disappeared among the Najrānite polytheists at least two centuries before the advent of Islam. Instead, the worship of traditional Arabian idols became perhaps the most common among Najrānite polytheists during the period under study. Although the available sources cannot offer a specific date for the beginning of idol worship in Najrān, it is interesting that the epigraphic research shows that mentions of the Holy Planetary Trinity began to disappear from southern Arabian inscriptions from the beginning of the fifth century CE (Beeston, 1984, al-Iryānī, 1990). The epigraphic research assumes that monotheism defeated this type of polytheism and most people converted to it (Beeston, 1984, al-Iryānī, 1990). In the current research, it can be argued that this could be in relation to the disappearance of this type of polytheism in Najrān and its replacement by the worship of idols. The fifth century CE was not too far from the lifetime of ‘Amr ibn Luḥaī al-Khuzā‘ī, who supposedly brought idols to Arabia, as detailed earlier. This provides one possible answer to suggest that the worship of idols probably began to spread amongst Najrānite polytheists from the fourth century CE.

The worship of idols amongst pre-Islamic Arabs included different features such as the types of idol, the theological concepts behind them and the materials used to make them. They can also be divided into gods and goddesses, due to their original terminology in Arabic, or the historical and religious background (Ali, 1993, Hawting, 1999). Moreover, the basic theological concept of these idols was that most of them acted as intercessors with Allah (Ali, 1993).

In the case of Najrān, Sammār (1994) supposes that the polytheists of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b in Najrān only worshipped one idol, Yaghūth. He considers the long distance between Najrān and other Arabian regions to be a factor in this supposition. Here, it is argued that linking the worship of idols only to relative distance does not appear to be sensible. Instead, there seems to be strong evidence to presume that Najrānite polytheists did not differ from other Arabs in adopting the same features of idol worship, as will be discussed in the following sections.

### 3.3.1 Female idols (goddesses)

Ibn al-Kalbī (1924) referred to the polytheists of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Kaʿb as one group who practised rituals of worship for three goddesses, al-ʿUzzā, Manāt and al-Lāt, the three most venerated goddesses in Arabian polytheism, particularly at the time of the Ḥajj. This important statement shows that Najrānite polytheists worshipped several idols at the same time. Significantly, it also reflects the important role of the Ḥajj in the transmission of the worship of such idols to the Najrān region. The epigraphic research and other Muslim sources are helpful to see to what extent Ibn-al-Kalbī's statement is accurate in showing that other goddesses were worshipped amongst the polytheists of the region.

The Muslim historian al-Azraqī (1965) related that ʿAmr ibn Luḥaī al-Khuzāʿī established a great house for the idol of the well-known goddess al-ʿUzzā in the Nakhlā valley, located to the north of Mecca. He claimed that ʿAmr ibn Luḥaī al-Khuzāʿī first invited the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Kaʿb and the Banū Rabiʿah to worship al-ʿUzzā. This statement implies that the worship of al-ʿUzzā was brought to Najrān by ʿAmr ibn Luḥaī al-Khuzāʿī, as in the case of the god Yaghūth, discussed later. This short statement cannot offer further details concerning when these people of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Kaʿb began to worship al-ʿUzzā, because it is based on oral tradition rather than documentary evidence. However, the previous reference from Ibn al-Kalbī (1924) provides more details than al-Azraqī's statement on how and when the polytheists of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Kaʿb worshipped al-ʿUzzā, which was in the Ḥajj, as will be detailed later.

In a recent epigraphic discovery, Arbach et al. (2008) and al-Khudair (2012) refer to al-ʿUzzā as the nomenclature of a man called ʿAbd al-ʿUzzā who lived in the town of Ḥemā in the east of Najrān. Despite the fact that neither of these researchers offers approximate dates for this man's lifetime, there seems to be supportive evidence for the worship of this idol amongst Najrānite polytheists during the time covered by the current study. But there is one concern about the spread of the worship of al-ʿUzzā from Mecca to Najrān. The existence of this idol is likely to have preceded al-Azraqī's statement by a long time. As evidence, the epigraphic research shows that al-ʿUzzā was a goddess of southern Arabian polytheists that symbolised Venus (Bāfaqīh, 1985, Ali, 1993, al-Urayqī, 2002). Furthermore, the worship of a Venus deity had already reached the region with the name ʿAthtar, as mentioned earlier. This means that the term al-ʿUzzā reflects a new development in the worship of the Venus deity, replacing the old term ʿAthtar with the most common name, al-

‘Uzzā, and perhaps adopting new rituals of worshipping this idol, which will be discussed later (see section 3.7).

The second goddess to appear in Najrānite inscriptions is the well-known idol al-Lāt (al-Ḥazmī, 2011, al-Khudair, 2012). Muslim sources describe al-Lāt as a public goddess for Arab polytheists, whose idol was relocated to a great temple in al-Ṭāʾif under the guardianship of the Banū Thaḳīf tribe (Ibn al-Kalbī, 1924, Ibn-Ḥabīb, 1942, al-Shahrastānī, 1992, al-Ḥamawī, 1995). The use of “al-Lāt” for people’s names has been found in several inscriptions in the south and east of Najrān can be clear evidence of the worship of this goddess among Najrānite polytheists (al-Ḥazmī, 2011, al-Khudair, 2012).

In addition to the above idols, Ibn-Ḥabīb (1942) refers to the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Kaʿb as one of the tribal groups, including the Banū Daws, Khathʿam, Bajīla and al-Azd, who worshipped the idol Dhū al-Khalaṣa, which was located in the town of Tabāla.<sup>36</sup> Sammār (1994) disagrees with this statement, due to the distance between Najrān and Tabāla. It has been argued that Sammār did not take into consideration the statement that Dhū al-Khalaṣa was regarded with great veneration among southern Arabian tribes (Ibn al-Kalbī, 1924, Ibn-Ḥabīb, 1942). Also, this idol was called *al-Kaʿba al-Yamāniyya* (The Yemenite Kaʿba), which offers clear evidence that Dhū al-Khalaṣa was regarded as a shrine of pilgrimage. Valuable accounts given by al-Yazīdī (1938), al-Balādhurī (1996), and al-Mubarrad (1997) refer to two separate fights that occurred near Dhū al-Khalaṣa between a group of Banū al-Ḥārith bin Kaʿb tribe and the two tribes of Banū Daws and Banū Bāhila when all those tribal groups came on pilgrimage to this idol. Thus, there appears to be sufficient information to presume that the idol Dhū al-Khalaṣa was of religious importance for the Najrānite polytheists as a place of pilgrimage, as will be detailed in the section 7.3.

In sum, there is therefore clear evidence for the practice of goddesses worship amongst the Najrānite polytheists, as Ibn-al-Kalbī’s statement suggests.

### 3.3.2 Male idols (gods)

The worship of male idols was a feature of Najrānite polytheism, as supported by epigraphic discoveries and Muslim sources.

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<sup>36</sup> A small town situated about 62 km to the west of the district of Bīsha in present-day southern Saudi Arabia (al-Sharīf, 1984).

One of these was the god al-Madān, after whom the grand chieftain of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b, ‘Abd al-Madān, was named. Little information can be learnt from Muslim sources about this idol, except a few details that describe this god as one of the pre-Islamic idols and focus on discussing its original meaning and location (al-Zabīdī, 1965, Ibn-Durayd, 1991, Ibn-Manẓūr, 1994, al-Ḥāzimī, 1995). On the meaning of its name, Ibn-Durayd (1991) surmises that al-Madān is linked to obedience, whereas the view of al-Ḥamawī (1995) is that al-Madān might be a place name or a time. Unfortunately, the available Muslim sources do not give useful details concerning the location of al-Madān. Ali (1993) claims that al-Madān was probably one of the al-Ḥijāz idols and was possibly placed in a special house, similarly to other gods at that time. This suggestion lacks a clear reference, as with previous sources. The use of the god al-Madān in naming some Najrānites, as seen in the name of their chieftain ‘Abd al-Madān, provides evidence to assume that this idol was worshipped by the polytheists of Najrān.

Another god is the famous Wadd, a moon deity (Ali, 1993, al-‘Urayqī, 2002). Historically, the fact that Wadd was widely worshipped among Arab polytheists, both in the north and south, is supported by Muslim sources and inscriptions. Muslim historians such as Ibn al-Kalbī (1924), Ibn-Ḥabīb (1942), al-Shahrastānī (1992), Ibn-Manẓūr (1994) and al-Ḥamawī (1995) spoke of Wadd as an idol that was worshipped by the people of the Prophet Noah (Nūḥ), before being brought to Arabia by ‘Amr ibn Luḥaī al-Khuzā‘ī. Meanwhile, a number of inscriptions from the north, east and middle of Arabia refer to Wadd as a worshipped god (Ali, 1993). These details provide clear evidence that Wadd was an old and popular god across many provinces of the Arabian Peninsula before being introduced into South Arabia.

In South Arabia, it is interesting that terms for the moon deity were different across nations and times: the Ma‘īnīs and Awsānīs referred to “Wadd”, while the Qatabānīs used the term “Am” (Bāfaqīh, 1985, al-‘Urayqī, 2002). During the Shebaen era, the polytheists of Najrān worshipped a moon god called al-Maqah, most probably after the invasion of Najrān by the Shebaen king Karib’il Watar around 680 BCE. The worship of this god from the Ḥimyarite period until the advent of Islam appears more obvious, but with significant changes. The archaeological missions to al-Ukhdūd confirmed that the term “Wadd” was inscribed on several houses and walls across the remnants of the town (Philby and Tritton, 1944, Philby, 1952, Ryckmans, 1981, al-Zahrānī et al., 2001, al-Zahrānī et al., 2006). These inscriptions give clear evidence of the worship of the idol

Wadd among Najrānites during the Ḥimyarite period, before the coming of Christianity. However, they do not provide details as to whether the worship of Wadd continued after the collapse of Ḥimyarite rule during the time under study.

Two recent studies conducted by al-Ḥazmī (2011) in Ḥemā in the east and al-Khudair (2012) at the al-Kawkab Mountain in the northeast of Najrān, where the Bedouins of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b settled, record “Wadd” being used as people’s names in several inscriptions. Although these inscriptions do not include any specific dates, the worship of Wadd amongst Najrānite polytheists is likely to have continued up to the coming of Islam. This may be because the influence of Christianity and Judaism in Bedouin areas appears to have been limited. The previous details confirm that the polytheists of Najrān worshipped more than one god, including Yaghūth, al-Madān and Wadd, in a similar way to their worship of goddesses.

### 3.3.3 The god Yaghūth

A number of Muslim sources refer to the god Yaghūth as the main idol of the Madhḥidj tribes and the Arab polytheists in Najrān, al-Jawf <sup>37</sup>, Jurash and other territories of South Arabia (Ibn al-Kalbī, 1924, Ibn-Ḥabīb, 1942, Ibn-Qūṭaybah, 1981). Unfortunately, there is not much information in the available sources, either Muslim accounts or southern Arabian inscriptions, about the early period of the idol Yaghūth’s appearance in Najrān and its surrounding regions. Because epigraphic research, particularly in Najrān and Jurash, has not found any details about this idol’s name, Robin (2009) claims that the use of a divine name (‘*Abd*, God) in Arab nomenclature cannot be sufficient evidence to prove the existence of the god Yaghūth during the pre-Islamic period in Najrān. This opinion is dubious, because the common use of divine terms in the nomenclatures of pre-Islamic Arabs clearly reflected religious beliefs, as can be seen in the use of the term Allah and famous Arab gods and goddess. The tracing of the background of Yaghūth until it appeared in South Arabia may be helpful in responding to Robin’s (2014) doubts.

There is one interesting reference to Yaghūth in a Thamūdīc inscription in northern Arabia, which mentions Yaghūth as *Taim-Yaghūth* in Thamūdīc nomenclature (Ali, 1993). The significance of this reference can be seen in its listing of Yaghūth with the gods and goddesses of the Thamūd people

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37 A desert region in the east north of Yemen (al-Hamdānī, 1989).

(Ali, 1993). Although this reference does not reveal any other details about the origins of this idol, it offers physical evidence to presume that the idol Yaghūth was worshipped in ancient times and was later brought to South Arabia, before becoming established in Najrān at an unknown date in the pre-Islamic era.

The origins of Yaghūth has interested Qur'anic commentators, who have linked Yaghūth to its historical context. Scholars such al-Zamakhsharī (1947), al-Qurṭubī (1964), al-Baghawī (1986), al-Ṭabarī (1995) and al-Bayḍāwī (1999) suggest that the term “Yaghūth” was perhaps the name of a saintly person who lived at the time of the Prophet Noah, but later Yaghūth became regarded by Noah's people as a god.

From these details, it is evident that the Muslim commentators' suggestion seems strongly influenced by the Qur'anic text, which indicates that this idol was one of the idols of the Prophet Noah's people: “They said: ‘Do not abandon your deities; do not abandon Wadd, nor Suwā', nor Yaghūth, nor Ya'ūq, nor Nasr’” (Sūrat Nūḥ, verse 23). This Quranic text seems to reflect a historical reference to the worship of the idol Yaghūth in ancient Mesopotamia, where the people of the Prophet Noah settled (Mahrān, 1988). At this point, the Qur'anic text and the commentators' suggestion significantly agree with the story of 'Amr ibn Luḥaī al-Khuzā'ī on that fact that Yaghūth had perhaps been worshipped since ancient times in the Fertile Crescent, either in Syria or Mesopotamia, before being brought to South Arabia.

The settling of the idol Yaghūth in South Arabia posits an important question: what can be learnt about the idol Yaghūth during the years immediately preceding the rise of Islam, in terms of the approximate date of the spread in worshipping this idol, its location and a description of its form and where it was housed. Firstly, literary sources mention the Najrānite poet 'Abd Yaghūth bin Ṣlā't al-Ḥārithī,<sup>38</sup> who was killed in the battle of al-Kilāb al-Thānī around 611 CE (Ibn 'Abd-Rabbih, 1965, al-Ḍabbī, 1998, Ibn al-Muthannā, 1998, al-Mubārak, 2000). The use of “Yaghūth” in his first name offers strong evidence to suggest that the worship of Yaghūth had spread widely among Najrānite polytheists by the second half of the sixth century at least, although perhaps this idol's house had not yet relocated to Najrān.

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38 He was a noble, a tribal leader and a poet, as well as commander of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka'b tribe in the battle of al-Kilāb al-Thānī in the pre-Islamic era, where he was killed (Ibn 'Abd-Rabbih, 1965, al-Iṣfahānī, 1997).



Secondly, regarding its locations: according to Muslim sources, the old location of the idol Yaghūth was in the town of Jurash and the Banū An'um, a clan of the Ṭayyi' tribe, were the stewards and guardians of this god (Ibn al-Kalbī, 1924, Ibn-Ḥabīb, 1942, Ibn-Qūṭaybah, 1981). However, the Murād tribe wanted to take responsibility for the guardianship of the idol Yaghūth, which caused tribal conflicts with the Banū An'um tribe. Consequently, the latter brought Yaghūth to the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka'b tribe and then the idol Yaghūth was relocated in Najrān under the protection and guardianship of the Banū an-Nār, a clan of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka'b. The Muslim sources do not refer to the specific date of relocating this idol in Najrān; they mention it in the light of recording the context of the battle of al-Razm that occurred around 2 AH/ 623 CE, namely in the second year of Prophet Muḥammad's life in Medina.

The remainder of the story is that the Murād tribe wanted to reclaim the idol Yaghūth from its location in Najrān but the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka'b tribe refused the Murāds' request (Ibn-Sa'ad, n.d., Ibn-Hishām, 1955, al-Qurṭubī, 1964, al-Ṭabarī, 1987). This led to military conflict, with the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka'b and the Hamdān tribe as allies against the Murād. This battle ended in defeat for the Murād, and the Yaghūth god was kept in Najrān.

It is clear that the main reason behind the battle al-Razm was the conflict over who had the right of guardianship of the idol Yaghūth. This battle therefore represented a serious challenge to Najrān as the centre for the worship of this idol. The refusal of the polytheists of Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka'b in Najrān to return it was most likely due to religious and economic factors. Firstly, religious: the relocation of Yaghūth led to positive results for polytheism in the Najrān region and its polytheists from Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka'b who became the official guardians of Yaghūth in a similar way to that of other guardians of great idols of the Arabs at that time. Moreover, the existence of Yaghūth in Najrān most probably increased its religious importance as a centre for polytheism, as it is known that Najrān was also the most important centre for Christianity in South Arabia, as debated in Chapter Two (see sub-section 2.5.2). This is because of the idol Yaghūth was most probably worshipped amongst many Arab polytheists, as will be detailed later.

This leads us to consider the second factor, the economic advantages for Najrān being a place of pilgrimage. Most likely, placing Yaghūth under the protection of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka'b would have led to improving commercial activities by attracting large numbers of polytheistic pilgrims in the Najrān markets, somewhat similar to Quraysh in Mecca. In total, the main

consequence of the battle of al-Razm was the support the religious status of Najrān as the centre for Yaghūth during the period from 623 to 631 CE when the Muslim call came to Najrān.

With regards to the description of the house and form of Yaghūth, an important statement reported by the Muslim commentator al-Qurṭubī (1964) gives valuable details on the location of Yaghūth. The eyewitness, Abū 'Uthmān al-Nahdī,<sup>39</sup> described the idol as being made from lead, designed with the face of a lion and carried on a camel. Whenever the camel stopped, its keepers would bring Yaghūth down and build a wall around it. This statement clearly describes the form and material of this idol, but more significantly it shows that although its worshippers used to carry it wherever they went, Yaghūth was located in a special house. This brings the discussion to Ali (1993) hypothesis on the position of public idols in pre-Islamic Arabia. He notes that the public idols of Arab polytheists, such as al-Lat, al-'Uzzā, Nasr and Ya'ūq, were placed in houses of worship, prepared for pilgrimage, allocated guardians and presented for all services that worshippers needed.

The god Yaghūth would have been in a similar position to those idols, as can be understood from a direct statement about al-'Awām bin Juhail, who was the last personal guardian (*Sādin*) of Yaghūth in the last few years before Islam (Ibn al-Athīr, 1997, Ibn-Ḥajar, 2010). Al-'Awām bin Juhail himself, after converting to Islam, spoke of how he used to sleep in the house of Yaghūth every night. He accordingly related that when he heard the news of Islam and the fact that Arab delegations had come to Medina, he broke the idol Yaghūth and went to Medina to convert to Islam (Ibn al-Athīr, 1997, Ibn-Ḥajar, 2010).

This statement confirms the suggestion that the idol Yaghūth was treated with great care by being placed in a special building and allocated guardians, as the Arabs used to do for their great idols. It also directly mentions the end of this idol, which occurred due to the rise of Islam, as happened in Mecca, al-Ṭā'if, Tabāla and every place where polytheism existed across the Arabian Peninsula.

The previous details show that a significant number of the polytheists of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka'b tribe, especially those who lived in the Bedouin districts of Najrān, adopted Yaghūth as their major god, like other Madhḥidj tribes. This idol seems to have been located in the town of Jurash at

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39 A southern Arabian tribal leader, who lived through the late pre-Islamic and early Islamic periods. He converted to Islam in the Prophet Muḥammad's time but did not meet the Prophet. Abū 'Uthmān al-Nahdī died in al-Kūfa in the early years of the 1st century AH (Ibn-Sa'ad, n.d., al-'Ijlī, 1984).

an unspecific date. The relocation of Yaghūth to Najrān was most probably late, and its period of residence perhaps did not exceed ten years prior to the coming of Islam to Najrān. This period was obviously short in comparison to other idols' locations, where they may have remained during the sixth and seventh centuries, until the advent of Islam. This short period of Yaghūth's sojourn in Najrān, in addition to its tendency to be moved, as al-Qurṭubī (1964) related, may offer logical evidence as to why Yaghūth was rarely recorded in the inscriptions of the region, as Robin (2014) wondered.

#### **3.3.4 The characteristics of worshipping idols, general assessment**

The above details show that Najrānite polytheists significantly changed their religious practices. They replaced ancient deities such as Dhū-Samawī, 'Athtar and al-Maqah al-Shams with the worship of idols such as Yaghūth, Wadd, al-'Uzzā and al-Lāt. This change does not mean they totally abandoned the worship of celestial bodies, but there is a considerable reduction in the worship of the main ancient deity, Dhū-Samawī, in addition to that of the Holy Planetary Trinity, Sun, Moon and Venus. The worship of the Moon and Venus deities did remain, but with the common Arab polytheistic names of the time, namely Wadd and al-'Uzzā. Meanwhile, the worship of Yaghūth, al-Lāt and Dhū al-Khalaṣa, in particular, imply that the Najrānite polytheists not only worshipped celestial bodies but also adopted other types of deity that symbolised saintly people, as can be seen in the case of the three previous idols. This all points to the considerable impact of northern and western Arabian provinces, where the main centres for most of these idols were located. In other words, the pilgrimage to Mecca played a significant and effective role in transmitting the worship of Wadd, al-'Uzzā and al-Lāt, because a visit to those idols was considered part of the Ḥajj rituals. This transmission included additional aspects of polytheistic faiths and rituals can be presumed by the fact that Najrānite polytheists shared many similar beliefs with other Arab polytheists, as will be shown in the sections that follow.

The worship of these idols at the same time reflects a form of religious pluralism amongst the Najrānite polytheists. This pluralism can be noted in the possibility of their worshipping more than one idol, and choosing what to believe in, whether from inside Najrān or in other Arabian regions where the great idols could be found. More evidently, the previous details show that the central houses of the idols, except for Yaghūth, were located in the Nakhla valley, al-Ṭā'if city or Tabāla. Some Muslim sources suggest that the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka'b polytheists used to worship at the

shrines of al-‘Uzzā, al-Lāt and Wadd during or after performing the great Ḥajj to Mecca (Ibn al-Kalbī, 1924, al-Azraqī, 1965). This information confirms that the worship of such gods or goddesses together was common, perhaps due to the religious background of each idol.

In summary, it can be concluded that Najrānite polytheists not only worshipped their local idols, but also shared with other Arabs the worship of the great idols that were regarded as sacred gods and goddesses among most Arab polytheists.

### **3.4 The theological concept of Allah**

The understanding of a supreme God amongst Najrānite polytheists is a significant issue to discuss here. This understanding can be linked to the original concept of worshipping idols. In this respect, the Qur’an in several verses stipulates that polytheistic Arabs believed Allah to be the greatest God in the universe and the creator of human beings, animals, trees and indeed everything in this life (Sūrat al-‘Ankabūt, verses 61, 63, Surah of Lūqmān, verse 32). Based on this, Ali (1993) assumes that pre-Islamic Arabs believed in Allah as the greatest God of their own deities and the creator of everything. He also concludes that the original concept of idols was that most polytheistic Arabs considered their idols to be intercessors for them with Allah.

In Najrān, Dā’ūd (1988) argues that there was probably a Christian-Jewish influence on this theological conception of Allah among the polytheists there, rather than its being an original belief of Arabian polytheism. The opposing viewpoints of Ali and Dā’ūd raise the question: did the Najrānite polytheists adopt a concept of Allah that was similar to other Arab polytheists at the same time, or were they influenced by Jewish-Christian doctrine, as Dā’ūd claims?

The established concept of the idol Yaghūth was that this idol may intercede on behalf of its worshippers with Allah, namely by asking relief from Allah (Ibn-Durayd, 1991). This concept does not differ from the original idea of most pre-Islamic idols, such as Manāt, al-Lāt and al-‘Uzzā. Significantly, it agrees with the Qur’anic verse “We worship them only that they may bring us nearer to Allah” (Sūrat az-Zumar, verse 3).

More interestingly, the invocation of Ḥajj (*al-Talbiya*) furnishes details to suggest Najrānite polytheists believed that Allah was the greatest God. Muslim historians such as al-Ya‘qūbī (1860),

Ibn-Ḥabīb (1942) and Quṭrub (1985) mention that the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b pilgrims, like other Madhḥidjī pilgrims, used to repeat more than one invocation for their different idols, as will be detailed later (see sub-section 3.7.1). However, it is significant that the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b pilgrims used to invoke Allah and ask for his love and mercy as worshippers (al-Ya‘qūbī, 1883, Ibn-Ḥabīb, 1942, Quṭrub, 1985). This appears to be a direct indication that Najrānite polytheists understood Allah to be the greatest God and the creator of all things.

Literary sources provide additional details of this. One of these is a poem by the Najrānite poet ‘Abd Yaghūth bin Ṣlā’t al-Ḥārithī. He used the term Allah more than once in his odes, when he described his people as *‘Ibād- Allah* (worshippers of God). In another ode, ‘Abd Yaghūth invoked Allah against his people because they did not rescue him from prison (Ibn ‘Abd-Rabbih, 1965, al-Iṣfahānī, 1997, al-Ḍabbī, 1998, Ibn al-Muthannā, 1998).

The above accounts do not reveal any obvious Christian-Jewish impact on the Najrānite polytheists’ understanding of Allah. Conversely, the previous details show that the concept of Allah among the Najrānite polytheists was similar to what other Arab polytheists believed concerning Allah as the highest God, the creator of the universe and one who cannot be represented by any other deity that they worshipped. So, they did not deny the existence of Allah, but at the same time believed in other deities which they regarded as partner gods and goddesses alongside Him. It is therefore proposed that the real impact of Judaism and Christianity on Najrān’s polytheists can be seen in the conversion of a significant number of Najrānites to the two religions, as will be discussed in Chapters Four and Five.

### **3.5 Mixed polytheistic beliefs**

Besides the worship of idols, the worship and veneration of trees, animals, jinn, stars, planets, stones and phenomena remained among polytheistic Arabs during the period under study (Dā’ūd, 1988, Ali, 1993, Dughaym, 1995, Hawting, 1999). The practice of these forms of polytheism raises the interesting question of whether they reflect a type of Totemism<sup>40</sup> among pre-Islamic societies. Smith (1907) cites the fact that many Arab tribes took their names from animals as evidence of the

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40 Totemism is a complex religion that consists of mixed rituals, beliefs and concepts. It is based on the relationship between a group of people and a natural object, in which they believe this object to be their divine protector, and probably worship it (Frazer, 1910).

existence of Totemism among polytheistic Arabs. On the other hand, Zaydān (2001) entirely disagrees with this hypothesis because it lacks one major requirement for Totemism: that the members of such a tribe should believe in one animal or tree as their ancestor. He argues that although those Arab tribes were named after animals, this does not mean that they believed these animals were their ancestors or worshipped them.

Nevertheless, the application of both Smith's and Zaydān's arguments regarding the Najrānite polytheists can provide an understanding of their beliefs concerning trees, animals, jinn, stones and phenomena, despite the scarcity of information here.

The veneration of specific kinds of tree was probably practised among Najrānite polytheists. The Muslim historian Ibn-Hishām (1955) recounted the Najrānites practice of worshipping a great palm before the spread of Christianity, and how this worship disappeared later. Although this story did not occur in the period under study, it shows that there is a clear precedent for the worship of trees by the polytheists of the region.

There is no direct information on whether the worship of trees remained a practice in Najrān during the time under research, although several Muslim sources provide accounts of the worship of a great tree, called Thāt Anwaṭ, until the time of the Prophet Muḥammad (Ibn-Durayd, 1987, al-Wāqidi, 1989, Ibn-Ḥibbān, 1997). These accounts record that many pilgrims to Mecca used to visit Thāt Anwaṭ and perform special rituals there, such as presenting sacrifices, praying and taking off their clothes, before entering the sacred area of Mecca. This type of worship was therefore still practised among many Arab polytheists across Arabia due to the impact of the Ḥajj. Hence, it is possible that there were some Najrānite polytheistic pilgrims, who with other Arabs worshipped this sacred tree at the time of the Ḥajj. Significantly, the worship of trees, among Najrānite polytheists or other Arabs, does not reflect any kind of Totemism because they did not consider such a sacred trees to be an ancestor, although the sacred tree here seems to have been a god or goddess.

The veneration of animals was common among most Arab societies during the pre-Islamic era. This veneration is connected to the rituals of idol worship, or as a part of the pre-Islamic Ḥajj. More clearly, Ibn al-Kalbī (1924) recounted four forms of sacred animal: Baḥīrah, Sa'ibah, Waṣīlah and Ḥamī, which include male and female camels and sheep. All these forms were kept for the honour of the deities and it was forbidden to use these animals for their meat, milk or hair. Riding, hunting or injuring them was prohibited as well, as they were to be completely protected, respected and

given the freedom to graze, as the property of the deities. This ritual, according to Ibn al-Kalbī (1924), was also spread by ‘Amr ibn Luḥaī al-Khuzā‘ī.

This posits an important question as to whether such a ritual was spread by al-Khuzā‘ī among the Najrānite polytheists. Although available Muslim sources do not give direct accounts concerning this, the significant participation of pilgrims from the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b supports the suggestion that they had to practise a form of animal veneration during the days of the Ḥajj, especially offering sacrifices to deities, which was a basic ritual in worshipping idols and performing the Ḥajj, as will be detailed later (see sub-section 3.7.1). Therefore, it is suggested that every sacrificed animal was placed in a sacred position before it was offered to the deity. This involved the veneration of the animal, such as forbidding people to eat them and allocating them land for grazing.

Another type of animal veneration can be presumed to exist, from the naming of some of the people of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b polytheists, for example al-Hajras (the son of the fox), al-Muḥajal (a type of horse) and Hūbar (hairy camel) (Ibn-Hishām, 1955, Ibn ‘Abd-Rabbih, 1965, Ibn-Durayd, 1991, Ibn-Manzūr, 1994, al-Iṣfahānī, 1997). The probable reason behind someone being named after these animals is that some of those polytheists believed that these animals had hidden power and could perhaps hurt them. Therefore, some groups of polytheists venerated these animals to avoid their evil (Dā‘ūd, 1988, Ali, 1993, Dughaym, 1995).

Archaeological discoveries record several inscriptions and remnants of several animals, such as lions, horses, bulls, snakes and camels (al-Zahrānī et al., 2001, āl-Hatīlah, 2015). These inscriptions and remnants may reflect a form of venerating those animals by making them sacred, before presenting them as sacrifices to deities, as in the case of the bull and the camel, or because they may have hidden power, as can be assumed in the case of the lion, snake and horse. Both types of veneration probably did not conform to Smith’s hypothesis of Totemism, because these Najrānite polytheists did not regard such animal as full deities.

The veneration of stones apparently continued among Arab polytheists, even though it was a primary stage of Arabian polytheism, before the worship of idols, as mentioned earlier (see section 3.2). In Najrān, the worship of stones existed until the beginning of Islam, despite the presence of traditional idols, as can be evidenced by the use of the term *Ḥajar* (stone) in the nomenclature of ‘Abdul Ḥajar bin ‘Abdul al-Madān before the Prophet Muḥammad changed his name to ‘Abdullah (Ibn-Sa‘ad, n.d., Ibn al-Athīr, 1997, Ibn-Ḥajar, 2010).

In addition, the belief that jinn existed and had divine power was common among Najrānite polytheists, like other Arab societies during the time under study. This can be seen in the spread of the practices of divination and astrology among Najrānite society, of which there are two obvious examples. The first is ad-Dayyān bin Quṭun al-Ḥārithī, the famous chieftain of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b, who was said to have asked jinn to help him in performing his divinations (al-Iṣfahānī, 1997). The second example is that of al-Ma’mūr al-Ḥārithī<sup>41</sup>, who was the master soothsayer and fortune-teller of all the Madhḥidj tribes (Ibn ‘Abd-Rabbih, 1965, al-Marzubānī, 1982, Ibn al-Kalbī, 1988). This man used to predict what would happen before any major events, telling his people what they would face, and claiming to speak to jinn and to listen to their advice and news (al-Iṣfahānī, 1997).

Both examples show that the understanding of the concept of jinn among Najrānite polytheists did not differ from that of other Arabs at the time. This concept was essentially based on the belief that jinn had supernatural powers, the ability to disappear, take the form of more than one creature and be able to hurt any person who might be exposed to them (Dā’ūd, 1988, Ali, 1993, Dughaym, 1995). Therefore, the Arab polytheists probably used to offer sacrifices when moving to a new house or fetching water from the well. Their belief in jinn here apparently did not consider jinn to be full deities – unlike their idols or trees. In other words, the veneration of jinn did not involve building special houses to practise rituals, as Najrānite polytheists used to perform for their idols or sacred trees, as detailed earlier. It appears that jinn were simply given a form of veneration due to the above beliefs, similar to the status of some animals.

In addition, the veneration of some types of celestial body, especially stars, remained among the Najrānites, like other Arab polytheists, despite the disappearance of the worship of celestial bodies as full deities, as has been discussed earlier (see section 3.3). In Najrān specifically, although the available information is sparse, there is evidence of types of star veneration among its polytheists. This can be seen in the case of al-Ma’mūr al-Ḥārithī, who claimed to communicate with stars and meteors to explain unseen knowledge (occultism), as well as using jinn (Ibn ‘Abd-Rabbih, 1965, al-Qālī, 1978, al-Marzubānī, 1982, Ibn al-Kalbī, 1988, Ibn al-Muthannā, 1998). During this period, the veneration and worship of the two stars Sirius (*al-Shi‘rā*), which symbolised extreme heat, and Pleiades (*al-Thurayā*), for bringing rain, appears to have been common among Arab polytheists

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41 He is described as a soothsayer and fortune-teller of Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b during the pre-Islamic period (al-Marzubānī 1982).



(Ibn-Ḥabīb, 1942, al-Azraqī, 1965, Ibn ‘Abd-Rabbih, 1965, al-Fākihī, 1994). Unfortunately, the available sources cannot tell to what extent the two stars were venerated among the polytheists of Najrān. But an interesting statement given by al-Ya‘qūbī (1883) indicates that groups of Madhḥidj, including Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b polytheists, used to invoke the Sirius in the Ḥajj.

These details reveal clear evidence of the existence of a type of veneration of stars amongst the polytheists of Najrān. It is possible that the veneration of stars was due to their role in telling the time, forecasting rain and guiding travelers.

In summary, the polytheists of Najrān apparently continued to worship and venerated sacred trees and stones as well as their idols. Meanwhile, the veneration of animals, jinn and celestial bodies perhaps related to their possession of hidden power or divine influence, rather than their being full deities, as the idols were. Smith’s hypothesis of the existence of Totemism cannot be supported, particularly in relation to venerating animals, because the Najrānite polytheists were unlikely to have considered any sacred animals to have been full deities or ancestors. As a result, the veneration of trees, animals or celestial bodies is significantly different from the main concept of Totemism.

### **3.6 Rituals of worship**

The polytheists of Najrān, like other Arabs, practised different types of ritual, either for specific polytheistic gods and goddesses, or as a general part of their religious lives. Unfortunately, the available sources supply limited information that is not sufficient to help the current study to cover this issue in detail. Linking this to what other Arab polytheists performed at the same time may give possible answers, in addition to the direct details concerning the area under study. Here, the origins of polytheistic rituals are significant. This question was addressed by Sayuti (1999) who suggests that some rituals of Arabian polytheism originally came from the old religion of Abraham. The author recounts some examples that are still present in Islam, such as the circumcision of boys, circumambulation of temples and performance of Ḥajj rites. Sayuti’s hypothesis was perhaps based on what Muslim historians reported about the spread of polytheism. More importantly, this hypothesis was obviously adopted in view of the existence of a small monotheistic group (*Aḥnāf*) who had rejected polytheistic faiths and adopted the rituals of *Ḥanifiyya* (Ibn-Hishām, 1955, al-Qurṭubī, 1964, al-Ṭabarī, 1995).

In the case of polytheism in Najrān, these Abrahamic roots are not marked by the practice of different types of ritual for their idols, such as presenting gifts, performing sacrifices, burning

incense and repeating some invocations to their idols, as Sayuti supposes (Ibn al-Kalbī, 1924, Ibn-Ḥabīb, 1942, al-Azraqī, 1965). More clearly, the epigraphic material provides little information on how some Najrānite polytheists sacrificed animals or invoked the idols of Wadd, al-Lāt and al-‘Uzzā in the east and northeast of Najrān (al-Ḥazmī, 2011, al-Khudair, 2012). It has also been seen that archaeological studies in al-Ukhdūd reported the remnants of altars where bulls were sacrificed to the deities (al-Zahrānī et al., 2012).

In addition, a special ritual for Yaghūth highlights helpful details to evaluate Sayuti’s hypothesis, even though the available details remain few. Only one statement was offered, by Ibn al-Kalbī (1924), which records that Yaghūth was carried to war as a special ritual for this idol. This can be seen in a significant event, the battle of al-Razm, in 2 AH/623 CE, when the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b tribe and their allies carried Yaghūth, and their poet said “Yaghūth led us unto the Murād and we vanquished them before the morning” (Ibn al-Kalbī, 1924, p 10, Transl. Sayuti, 1999, p 63). Ali (1993) suggests that the logical explanation for this ritual is that the worshippers of Yaghūth would have believed that he would support them in war and bring them victory. This belief does not seem to reflect a relationship between this idol and Sayuti’s hypothesis.

Features of *Ḥanifiyya* can be clearly noted in the performance of types of prayer (*Ṣalāt*) by the polytheists of Najrān, as can be seen in three stories. First, the prayer to Yaghūth to begin the Ḥajj reflects a special type of prayer that was performed by the worshippers of this idol. The historian al-Ya‘qūbī (1883) mentioned that some of this idol’s worshippers, particularly those who wanted to perform the Ḥajj, had to go to the house of Yaghūth and pray before going on the Ḥajj, calling upon Allah in their Ḥajj invocation, as will be discussed in the next section. Although al-Ya‘qūbī did not say when and why Najrānite polytheists decided to begin their Ḥajj to Mecca from this idol, this special prayer and Ḥajj invocation appears to maintain some features of *Ḥanifiyya* in both the prayer itself and the invocation of Allah. However, there may have been other forms of prayer performed at the house of Yaghūth, similar to what other polytheistic Arabs did during this period. Such forms of prayer to idols reflect a polytheistic tradition, rather than Abrahamic roots, because the prayer here seems to be a basic ritual of worshipping the idol itself, like gifts and sacrifices.

In the second story, according to al-Iṣfahānī (1997), Yazīd bin ‘Abd al-Madān bin ad-Dayyān said that his grandfather, ad-Dayyān bin Quṭun al-Ḥārithī, used to say “I prayed to the One who created this (indicating heaven), and who sets this (meaning earth)” (al-Iṣfahānī, 1997, Vol. 12, p 271)<sup>42</sup>.

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42 Transl. Researcher.

This story confirms that the ritual of prayer was known among the polytheists of Najrān. Although it is difficult to find specific details about the type, timing and method by which ad-Dayyān performed his prayer, the mention of the invocation and the prostration to God here reflects some similarity with the Muslim form of prayer. This means that ad-Dayyān's prayer perhaps contained features of the Abrahamic religion, because it was addressed to the One God.

The third story is an important poem reported by Ibn-Ḥabīb (1942), which speaks of performing the funeral prayer (*Ṣalāt al-Janāzah*) for the poet al-Afwah al-Awdī<sup>43</sup>, who had asked his companions to perform some rituals at his burial. This type of prayer was common among Arab polytheists until the coming of Islam. A number of Muslim scholars, such as Ibn-Ḥabīb (1942), al-Zabīdī (1965), Ibn-Sīdah (1996) and al-Iṣfahānī (1997) shed light on how Arab polytheists performed funerals, such as praising the merits and deeds of the person who had died, expressing sorrow at losing them, and crying around their grave. Significantly, there were irregular rituals that used to be performed after burying the dead, which disappeared with the spread of Islam, such as killing camels, building domes and pouring wine on the grave (Ibn-Ḥabīb, 1942, al-Iṣfahānī, 1997). Those irregular rituals were probably derived from polytheistic beliefs, rather than having Abrahamic roots. However, it is possible that some traditions of the funeral prayer continued in Islam, especially in using similar tools to wash, embalm, enshroud and bury the dead (Ibn-Sa'ad, n.d., Ibn-Ḥabīb, 1942, Ibn-Manzūr, 1994, Ibn-Sīdah, 1996).

Here, it is worth discussing the main reason for Islam accepting some funeral rituals despite the fact that these were practised by Arab polytheists. al-Janābī and Abdullah (2013) suggest that most Arab polytheists, including the people of Najrān, preserved some *Ḥanīfiyya* funeral practices, despite their polytheism. This suggestion agrees with Sayuti's hypothesis, which attributed the origins of such rituals to *Ḥanīfiyya*. This may be true, because the *Aḥnāf* performed such funeral rituals when burying their dead (Ibn-Ḥabīb, 1942). Another reasonable answer is that Muslim funeral rituals simply incorporated some previous traditions of funeral prayer that did not relate directly to polytheism.

In total, the practice of prayer among Najrānite polytheists in the three examples appears to be in considerable agreement with the fact that the Qur'an explicitly refers to some forms of prayer

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43 His full name is Ṣalā'a bin 'Amr bin Mālik al-Awdī, a pre-Islamic poet and tribal leader of his tribe, the Banū Awd which was considered to be part of Banū Madhīdj tribes (al-Iṣfahānī, 1997a).

practised by Arab polytheists (Sūrat al-Anfāl, verse 35). This means that Najrānite polytheists most likely understood prayer as a polytheistic ritual containing Abrahamic features, rather than as a result of a Christian-Jewish impact on them as Dā'ūd claimed.

The divining arrows (*al-Azlām*) was another significant ritual, and people who used it to predict their future normally performed it at the shrine of a deity (Ibn-Ḥabīb, 1942, Ibn-Sa'īd, 1982). According to several Muslim scholars, such as Ibn-Ḥabīb (1942), Muqātil (1979), Ibn-Sa'īd (1982) and al-Ṭabarī (1995), the guardian of the shrine supervised the practice of using the divining arrows and interpreting the result. More specifically, Muqātil (1979) and al-Ṭabarī (1995) related that Arab polytheists used to write on their arrows phrases such as “my Lord commands me” and “my Lord prevents me” and then shoot these arrows. Depending on where the arrows fell, they then accepted the result that the arrows showed. More interestingly, al-Ya'qūbī (1883) provides a detailed account of the most common phrases written on these arrows. He told that Arabs used to use seven arrows that contained phrases such as “Allah Almighty”, “for you”, “against you”, “yes” and “no”.

Here, the practice of the divining arrows ritual at idol shrines seems to have reflected the will of these idols for the future of those who practised the ritual. Although it appears to be a polytheistic ritual, the use of the word Allah in addition to naming their idols suggests an Abrahamic impact here. Theologically, this means that those who practised this ritual probably still believed the final result of the divining arrows was the will of God, rather than of their idols.

The available Muslim sources cannot provide specific details on the practice of the divining arrows among Najrānite polytheists, except the general view that this ritual was common amongst Arab polytheists, especially at the shrines to their great idols. Significantly, several Muslim sources refer to Dhū al-Khalāṣa and the shrine of the idol Hubal in Mecca as the most popular places to practise the divining arrows (Ibn al-Kalbī, 1924, Ibn-Hishām, 1955, al-Azraqī, 1965). This means the use of the divining arrows among Najrānite polytheists was very likely, as they used to undertake the pilgrimage to Mecca and Dhū al-Khalāṣa, as will be debated in the following section.

Overall, the rituals of worship among Najrānite polytheists seem to reflect polytheistic traditions, such as the rituals involved in worshipping idols, which included aspects of sacrifice, giving gifts and carrying the idol Yaghūth to war. Meanwhile, other rituals, such as prayer, the Ḥajj and even the divining arrows contained Abrahamic roots, as Sayuti suggests.

### 3.7 Ḥajj (Pilgrimage): Types, Rites and Cults

The term Ḥajj refers to the pilgrimage to Mecca, where the Ka'ba is situated, which is the most sacred location for Muslims. In the present study, however, this term is different because Arab polytheists, including Najrānites, practised two main types of Ḥajj during the period under study: the great pilgrimage to Mecca and pilgrimages to the sacred polytheistic deities (Ibn-Ḥabīb, 1942, al-Azraqī, 1965) .

#### 3.7.1 The Ḥajj to Mecca

The first type, the great pilgrimage, was called the Ḥajj and took place in Mecca in the last month of the lunar calendar, Dhū al-Ḥijjah, every year. It is described as the greatest religious event during pre-Islamic times, because it included commercial and social festivals (al-Afghānī, 1974, Dughaym, 1995). In other words, there were several annual fairs (*Aswāq*) held before the beginning of the Ḥajj in places close to Mecca, and a large number of Arab polytheists used to join the Ḥajj to hold literary activities, trade and sell commodities during the days of the Ḥajj (al-Afghānī, 1974, Ali, 1993). Before going through the rites of the Ḥajj, it is important to note that the major purpose of the pre-Islamic Ḥajj was to perform a pilgrimage for Allah despite the fact that most pilgrims who used to undertake such a ritual were Arab polytheists (Ibn-Ḥabīb, 1942).

Available Muslim sources do not give detailed information on how Najrānite polytheists specifically performed the rites of Ḥajj, except for limited statements that reflect a significant presence of polytheists from the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka'b in the events of the Ḥajj, at both special and general rituals. In this respect, the famous Arab fair 'Ukāz<sup>44</sup> was a favourite place for Najrānite pilgrims before beginning the Ḥajj rituals. As evidence, al-Iṣfahānī (1997) related how Yazīd bin 'Abd al-Madān bin ad-Dayyān, the grand chieftain of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka'b, went to 'Ukāz and held debates with other tribal leaders before going on the Ḥajj.

For the rites of the Ḥajj itself, Ali (1993) suggests that pre-Islamic pilgrims perhaps used to begin the Ḥajj journey by crossing at the places stated for the Ḥajj (*Mwāqīt*), before entering the official boundaries of Mecca (*al-Ḥaram*). In this regard, a number of Muslim sources agree that the town of

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44 'Ukāz is considered the most famous fair of the pre-Islamic era, because it was regularly held in the month preceding the Ḥajj (Shahīd 2016a).

Yalamlam<sup>45</sup> was allocated for pilgrims from Yemen, certainly during the time of the Prophet Muḥammad (al-Ya‘qūbī, 1860, al-Maqdisī, 1909, al-Iṣṭakhrī, 1927, al-Bakrī, 1983, al-Hamdānī, 1989). These sources unfortunately do not include any clear reference to whether those places were allocated during the pre-Islamic period or not. The polytheistic pilgrims from Najrān, like other Arabs, most likely performed the rituals for entering the sacred state of the Ḥajj (*Ihrām*) by washing their whole body (*Ghusl*) and wearing Ḥajj clothes. However, polytheistic pilgrims did not seem to know about the stated places for the Ḥajj in pre-Islamic times, as Ali supposes. This issue caused disagreement between Muslim sources, as can be seen from three suggestions. First, a number of Muslim historians, such as Ibn-Bakkār (1961), al-Azraqī (1965), Ibn-Ḥabīb (1985) and al-Marzūqī (1996), agreed that most pre-Islamic Arabs who wanted to embark on a pilgrimage to Mecca preferred to go to the three fairs, which started with the most popular, ‘Ukāz, in the first twenty days of Dhū al-Qi‘dah, before spending the rest of the time prior to the first days of Dhū al-Ḥijjah, preceding the Ḥajj, in Majannā and Dhū al-Majāz. Meanwhile, another group, including Ibn-Hishām (1955), Ibn-Durayd (1991), al-Wāqidī (1989) and Ibn-Ḥibbān (1997), supposed that the visit to the sacred tree Thāt Anwaṭ offered an alternative way to enter the sacred state of the Ḥajj, because many polytheistic Arab pilgrims thought that visiting this tree at the beginning of the Ḥajj was the best way to start their Ḥajj rituals. Third, al-Ya‘qūbī (1883) narrated that when Arab pilgrims came to Mecca, every group had to stand and pray at their idols before travelling to Mecca to perform the Ḥajj rites. He stipulated that the worshippers of Yaghūth, including Najrānites, had to stand at its house, praying, and then repeat the Ḥajj invocation until they reached Mecca.

This disagreement offers additional evidence to assume that beginning the Ḥajj ritual at stated places had not been adopted yet, unlike Ali’s claim. More clearly, the holding of the three famous fairs near Mecca (‘Ukāz, Majannā and Dhū al-Majāz) before the beginning of the Ḥajj rituals, and the use of those fairs by large numbers of pilgrims to enter the sacred state of Ḥajj, is most likely true, because this situation remained until the time of the Prophet Muḥammad at least. The three fairs probably offered the most popular way to begin the sacred state of Ḥajj due to their economic advantages. Najrānites who could not attend the three fairs were probably able to enter the sacred state of Ḥajj from their main idol Yaghūth, or at the famous sacred tree Thāt Anwaṭ.

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45 A small town about 90 km southeast of Mecca where for the past 1400 years pilgrims have officially begun their journey preparing for the Ḥajj (*Ihrām*) (al-Hamdānī, 1989).

For the next part of the Ḥajj, the available sources show that the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b polytheists did not differ from other Arab polytheists in practising the primary rituals of the Ḥajj, such as running around the Ka‘ba (*Tawāf*), walking seven times between al-Ṣafā and al-Marwah (*al-Sa‘ī*), staying in Minā on the 10th, 11th and 12th days of the month of Dhū al-Ḥijjah, and stoning devils (*Ramī al-Jamarāt*) (Ibn-Ḥabīb, 1942, al-Shahrastānī, 1992, Ali, 1993). They also shared with other Arabs the performing of polytheistic rites that were regarded as a part of the Ḥajj rituals during the days of the Ḥajj, such as praying to the most sacred idols surrounded the Ka‘ba. This can be seen clearly in their praying to the two idols of Isāf and Nā’ilā, which were located on the hills of al-Ṣafā and al-Marwah, and slaughtering animals to both idols as sacrifices (Ibn al-Kalbī, 1924, al-Azraqī, 1965, al-Fākihī, 1994).

However, the polytheists of Najrān differed from other polytheistic groups in their performance of several Ḥajj rites. Muslim historians agree that the Najrānite polytheists belonged to a special type of pilgrimage cult. These historians, however, argue about whether they were *al-Ḥums* (extremists in Ḥajj rites) or *al-Ṭuls* (moderates in Ḥajj rites). The majority of them, including Ibn-Hishām (1955), al-Azraqī (1965), Ibn-Qūṭaybah (1981), Ibn-Ḥabīb (1985), Ibn-Durayd (1987), al-Marzūqī (1996) and al-Suhaylī (2000) did not mention the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b as members of the *al-Ḥums* cult. These are in agreement that *al-Ḥums* included the tribes who settled within the borders of the al-Ḥijāz province, such as the Quraysh, Khuzā‘a, Banū Kinānah, Banū ‘Āmer, Thaqīf, Banū Ghaṭafān and Banū ‘Adwān. These historians also stated that those tribes of *al-Ḥums* practised some unfamiliar rituals of pilgrimage, such as disrobing while running around the Ka‘ba, refraining from meat, and not standing at ‘Arafāt.<sup>46</sup> According to Ibn-Sa‘ad (n.d.), Ibn-Hishām (1955) and Ibn-Ḥabīb (1985), the members of *al-Ḥums*, especially the Quraysh tribe, adopted these unfamiliar rituals because they believed that they were the people of the sacred area (*Ahl al-Ḥaram*).

The above Muslim historians are clear in their description of the main features of the *al-Ḥums* cult in terms of its meaning, rules, members and special rituals. This cult therefore seems to have been connected to the tribes who lived within the borders of the sacred area of Mecca.

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46 A venerated pilgrimage site, located around 21 km east of Mecca, where Muslims pilgrims, both in the past and now, must be on the 9th of Dhū al-Ḥijjah (Rubin, 2009).

The only different account is offered by al-Jāhiz (1964), who refers to the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b as part of the tribal group *al-Ḥums* in light of the close relations between some Meccan and Najrānite families. This suggestion seems to be an additional clarification of the concept of *al-Ḥums*, rather than a contradiction, because al-Jāhiz does not completely refuse the main features of *al-Ḥums*, particularly that it includes the tribes living within Mecca’s borders. He noticeably identifies Najrānites due to their relationship with the people of Mecca. This suggestion is most likely to be for a limited number of Najrānites, because some polytheists of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b worshipped the idols of the Quraysh, such as al-Lāt and al-‘Uzzā, as mentioned earlier (see section 3.3).

For the *al-Ṭuls* cult, the historian Ibn-Ḥabīb (1942), in particular, categorised the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b as one of the members of the cult of *al-Ṭuls*, which included all of the southern Arabian tribes. Here, it is interesting to note that the identification of this cult was based on the same categorisation as the tribes of *al-Ḥums*, namely geographical location. This common factor supports Ibn-Ḥabīb’s account, because the polytheistic pilgrims of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b differed from other western and middle Arabian tribes, while resembling other southern Arabs in their practice of some Ḥajj rituals.

Ibn-Ḥabīb (1942) recounted several rituals that were performed by *al-Ṭuls* pilgrims, such as running around the Ka‘ba in special pilgrim attire, entering the mosque from the front and standing on Mount ‘Arafāt. The author points out that *al-Ṭuls* pilgrims were similar to *al-Ḥums* in particular rituals, especially in wearing the same Ḥajj attire as *al-Ḥums* while running around the Ka‘ba.

The pilgrimage invocation is another interesting matter concerning the polytheists of Najrān and their neighbours in Madhḥidj. They used a special invocation during the Ḥajj, which was known as *al-Talbiya*. The correct text of this invocation is not clear, with al-Ya‘qūbī (1883), Ibn-Ḥabīb (1942) and Quṭrub (1985) giving three different accounts. The historian al-Ya‘qūbī (1883) related that the Madhḥidj invocation, used by the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b polytheists, was to the *al-Shi‘rā* star, al-Lāt and al-‘Uzzā, whereas Ibn-Ḥabīb (1942) narrated that the worshippers of Yaghūth who went on Ḥajj used to say: “at your service, O God, at your service” (Transl. Hawting, 1999, p22). Meanwhile, Quṭrub (1985) refers to another text, quite a long one, where they call on the Lord of



*al-Halal* (permissible), *al-Haram* and *al-Hajar al-Aswad* (the black stone), as they crossed high mountains and faced frightening thunder and lightning for their God.

From these details, the difference between the three accounts probably means that pre-Islamic Najrānite polytheistic pilgrims, like other groups, did not adopt one fixed Ḥajj invocation. The link between this variation and the types of god or goddess worshipped by Najrānite polytheists offers a reasonable interpretation of this difference. It can be suggested that each idol's worshippers repeated a special invocation for their god or goddess.

Additionally, the above accounts reflect the considerable impact of Meccan polytheism on polytheistic faiths in Najrān. This can be observed in the adoption of more than one cult of Ḥajj, as can be seen in the case of *al-Hums* and *al-Ṭuls*. It can be also assumed that they practised types of worship to Meccan idols in the days of the Ḥajj, as most Arabs did. This impact noticeably led to the spread of the worship of idols such as al-Lāt and al-ʿUzzā to the Najrān region itself, as detailed above.

### **3.7.2 Pilgrimage to Idols**

The second kind of pilgrimage was to visit Arab idols, which were situated in several places across Arabia. Pilgrimage to famous pre-Islamic idols such as al-Lāt, al-ʿUzzā and Dhū al-Khalāṣa was a common ritual performed by Arab polytheists at different times throughout the year. As concluded earlier, there were large numbers of Najrānite polytheists who worshipped these idols, and some details of pilgrimages to these idols by groups of Najrānite polytheists can be ascertained.

The available Muslim sources, such as Ibn al-Kalbī (1924), Ibn-Ḥabīb (1942), al-Azraqī (1965) and al-Shahrastānī (1992), confirm that groups of polytheistic Arabs, especially those who worshipped the two goddesses al-Lāt and al-ʿUzzā, used to go on pilgrimage to these idols' shrines after the end of the Ḥajj to Mecca.

Two reasons provide evidence that some groups of Najrānite polytheists performed the pilgrimage to these two idols: the worship of al-Lāt and al-ʿUzzā amongst Najrānite polytheists, and their performance of the great Ḥajj to Mecca. It has already been suggested that al-Lāt and al-ʿUzzā gained worshippers among the polytheists of Najrān, and many of those used to go to Mecca for the Ḥajj. As the previous Muslim sources state, a number of Arab polytheists travelled to al-ʿUzzā's

house in the Nakhlā valley and to al-Lāt's temple in al-Ṭā'if; therefore, it seems reasonable to assume that a number of the Najrānite worshippers of both goddesses used to do that too.

For the pilgrimage to Dhū al-Khalaṣa, Ibn-Ḥabīb (1942) recorded that some groups of Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka'b polytheists used to go on pilgrimage to the temple of this idol in Tabāla and performed some rites there, such as circumambulation around its temple, performing sacrifices, and offering food and wine, as well as using the divining arrows. The practice of using the divining arrows at this idol's house gave it special importance, because it was described as one of the most popular idols for the performance of this ritual (Ibn al-Kalbī, 1924, Ibn-Ḥabīb, 1942, Ibn-Sa'īd, 1982). Thus, the pilgrimage to Dhū al-Khalaṣa by Najrānite polytheists is most likely to have happened, due to its importance in performing the ceremony of divining arrows.

Najrān may have become the destination for this type of pilgrimage after the relocation of the idol Yaghūth under the guardianship of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka'b. The idol Yaghūth seems to have been worshipped widely among polytheistic Arabs, not just in Najrān and in its neighbouring regions. That can be concluded in the use of the nomenclature of the servant (*'Abd*) of Yaghūth in tribes such as the Quraysh, Banū Bāhila, Banū 'Āmer, Hamdan and Banū Taghlib (Ibn al-Kalbī, 1988, al-Suhaylī, 2000, Ibn-Ḥajar, 2010). Here, the suggestion of Ali (1993) in assuming that the public idols of Arab polytheists were destinations of pilgrimage would most probably have applied in the case of the idol Yaghūth, because it also appears to have been a public god. In other words, the house of Yaghūth in Jurash, later relocated to Najrān, probably became a place of pilgrimage for those who worshipped this idol.

In total, the polytheists of Najrān mostly did not differ from other Arab polytheists in going on pilgrimage to famous pre-Islamic idols, and performing types of pilgrimage rituals at those idols' shrines.

### **3.8 Conclusion**

The general examination of Najrānite polytheism reveals some interesting results. The history of polytheism in Najrān appears to be connected to the historical development of polytheism in other Arabian regions. It is obvious that polytheistic faiths had existed in Najrān before the seventh century BCE at least, as in other regions in ancient South Arabia. Likewise, the spread of the worship of idols happened at approximately the same time as in other Arabian regions, around the fourth century CE.

Another interesting suggestion here is that polytheism in Najrān appears to have been similar to that in other polytheistic areas throughout the Arabian Peninsula, in its main elements, including types of idol, rituals of worship and the adoption of mixed beliefs. More specifically, as detailed in this chapter's introduction, the general definition of Arabian polytheism, as Dughaym (1995), Hawting (1999), Hoyland (2001) and Mir (2014) suggest, can be seen through the main features of polytheism in Najrān, in opposition to Dā'ūd (1988) claim.

The worship of idols such as Yaghūth, Wadd, al-'Uzzā and al-Lāt was most likely the most common type of worship for the polytheists of Najrān, instead of the worship of the Holy Planetary Trinity of Sun, Moon and Venus. These idols consisted of both gods and goddesses, as with other Arabian polytheists at the time.

During the period under study, the god Yaghūth was likely to have been the major idol for the majority of Najrānites polytheists. In the last decade before the advent of Islam, Najrān probably became an important centre of Arabian polytheism, in particular for Yaghūth's worshippers, after the relocation of this idol to Najrān, under the protection of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka'b tribe. This god was one of the most sacred idols among Arabs, and became a major shrine for polytheistic pilgrims to visit until the rise of Islam.

The spread of idol worship among Najrānite polytheists does not mean, however, that they denied the existence of a supreme God, but that they believed in the existence of other gods and goddesses alongside Allah. The belief in Allah here most likely did not reflect Christian or Jewish influence as Dā'ūd (1988) supposes, because this concept was originally linked to the worship of idols that were assumed to act as intercessors with Allah. It probably reflects residual features from the old religion of Abraham before the spread of polytheism, as Sayuti suggests.

Sayuti's hypothesis, however, is not obvious in other rituals or beliefs. In other words, what Najrānite polytheists used to practise in terms of rituals for their deities did not appear to be related to the Abrahamic religion, as can be seen in the polytheists' presentation of gifts and sacrifices, the burning of incense and the repetition of certain invocations. These rituals perhaps reflected polytheistic tradition, except for prayer and the Ḥajj to Mecca, which were Abrahamic features.

Besides worshipping idols, the polytheists of Najrān did not really differ from other Arab groups in their adherence to mixed beliefs in sacred trees, animals, jinn, stones and stars. The claim that these mixed beliefs formed a type of Totemism is not fully accurate, because they did not consider these

animals, trees or stars to be their ancestors. The veneration or worship of these animals, jinn or stars may have been due to a perception that they had some hidden or divine power.

The practice of pilgrimage appears the most interesting ritual amongst the polytheists of Najrān. They were familiar with two types of this: the Ḥajj to Mecca and the pilgrimage to their idols. For the Ḥajj to Mecca, although a minor number of them belonged to *al-Ḥums*, most pilgrims from Najrān were loyal to the cult of *al-Ṭuls*, which included the majority of the southern Arabian tribes. The members of this cult performed most rituals of the pre-Islamic Ḥajj, such as running around the Ka'ba, standing on Mount 'Arafāt, stoning devils and walking between al-Ṣafā and al-Marwah. Pilgrims from Najrān, however, seem to have varied amongst themselves with regards to the special Ḥajj invocation that they used; this was perhaps due to their worship of more than one idol.

With regard to pilgrimage to the shrines of idols, the polytheists of Najrān were similar to other Arab polytheists in visiting famous idols such as al-Lāt, al-'Uzzā and Dhū al-Khalaṣa. They even relocated the house of the idol Yaghūth to Najrān, as suggested above, which probably made Najrān a destination for pilgrimage itself.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Judaism: Origins, Situations and Aspects of Religious Life**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

During the time following the end of the Ḥimyarite Kingdom around 525 CE, and prior to the early decades of Islam, Jewish people formed a major part of Najrānite multi-religious society at that time. The Najrānite Jewish community, nevertheless, appears to have been small in comparison to the Christians and polytheists, and later the Muslims. This is probably the reason for the lack of interest in Najrān Jews among all categories of primary sources.

Throughout the present chapter, it is important to understand how Judaism became a part of the religious structure of Najrān before examining the religious aspects of its followers. This can be done in light of three main stages of the history of Judaism in the region. The first one is by tracing the origins of Judaism from ancient times prior to the beginning of the sixth century CE. The second stage can be learnt by investigating the situations of the Jews of Najrān during the three main phases when South Arabia was ruled in turn by the Ḥimyarites, the Abyssinians and the Persians during the pre-Islamic era. The third stage debates how Najrānite Jews became subject to new regulations established by the Muslim rule, which strongly influenced certain aspects of their lives, mainly the practice of religion, economic activities and social conditions.

In the section concerning these main aspects of Jewish religious life, three main issues will be addressed here: religious organisation, theological beliefs and rituals of worship.

#### **4.2 The origins of Judaism in Najrān**

Although Judaism was apparently the first monotheistic religion to arrive in Najrān for a considerable period of time, no precise date for this arrival has been found. The only way to reach an answer seems to be to correlate this with the history of Judaism in South Arabia, since Najrān was consistently a major part of the ancient Yemenite states, in particular during the Shebaen and Ḥimyarite periods (Ibn-Hishām, 1979, al-Ḥimyarī, 1987, al-Farah, 2004). In this respect, the existence of Judaism in South Arabia, including Najrān, appears to have developed over a long period of time.

In the first account, the existence of Judaism in Najrān can be dated back to the reign of the Shebaen governor of Najrān, al-Qulummas bin al-Afa‘ā, who converted to the religion of King Solomon, around the tenth century BCE; this governor was subsequently responsible for the spread of Judaism among his people during this ancient time (Ibn-Hishām, 1979, al-Ḥimyarī, 1987). This account seems to be based on Biblical and Qur’anic texts which date the arrival of Judaism in Yemen to around the 10<sup>th</sup> century BCE, as mentioned, when the Queen of Sheba accepted the call of Solomon, the King of Israel, and converted to his religion (Kings 10:1, Chronicles 9:1–12, Matthew 12:42, Sūrat al-Naml 20-44). Both Biblical and Qur’anic texts are discussed by several researchers, who are divided into two groups:

In the first, Lecker (1995b) describes the story of al-Qulummas as a “historiographical legend” because of the absence of documentary evidence (p 636), while Abū Jabal (1999) sees that southern inscriptions say nothing about an exact time for the arrival of Judaism in Yemen. Both researchers claim that what is reported of the encounter between King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba may be a legend rather than a historical account.

In the second group, Stillman (1979) and Mahrān (1988) argue that the Biblical and Qur’anic texts are accepted because of the existence of commercial relationships between South Arabia and ancient Palestine which favours the idea that the Jewish faith reached Yemen. This can be suggested by the number of Jews who resided near stations on the trading caravan route for incense and spices (Stillman, 1979). Mahrān (1988) also argues that the explicit reference in Qur’anic texts to the worship of the Sun in the Kingdom of Sheba corresponds here to epigraphic and archaeological research which confirms that the Sun was the major deity in ancient South Arabia. Mahrān (1988) suggests this significant correlation offers additional evidence for the credibility of the encounter between the King Solomon and the Shebaen Queen.

The suggestion by Stillman (1979) and Mahrān (1988) is plausible, in view of the fact that the commercial relationships between South Arabia and ancient Palestine most likely existed for a long time, and attracted the interest of the Romans later to invade Najrān in the first century BC, as mentioned in Chapter Two (see sub-section 2.5.1). These commercial relationships perhaps played a role in establishing a Jewish influence, especially on the main centres of trade located on the caravan route.

A funerary inscription of a Ḥimyarite Jew, discovered in Palestine, which may date back to the first century CE, provides the oldest physical evidence for the existence of Judaism in South Arabia

(Ahroni, 1986, Nebes, 2009). It reports that the Ḥimyarite Jew came to trade but died and was then buried in a Jewish cemetery. This important inscription provides a significant piece of evidence for the existence of commercial relationships between ancient South Arabia and Palestine which may have contributed to the spread of Judaism in South Arabia for several centuries before the birth of Christ.

The two Christian historians Lector (Migne, 1844) and Philostorgius (2007), who lived during the fourth and fifth century CE, described the status of Jews in South Arabia as being a small community living among a majority of polytheists. Both agreed that Judaism had arrived several centuries earlier, perhaps since the meeting of King Solomon and Queen of Sheba, but its converts were still few in number compared to the worshippers of the sun, the moon and local deities. Although the accounts by the two Christian historians show that the Jewish existence in that period remained limited as a religious minority, they confirm the researcher's suggestion of the existence of a Jewish influence in South Arabia that had developed from ancient eras onwards.

The beginning of the fifth century CE was historically important for the existence of Judaism in South Arabia and Najrān in particular. A number of Muslim sources relate that King Tubb' Abū Kariba As'ad became the first Ḥimyarite ruler to convert to Judaism (al-Ya'qūbī, 1883, Ibn-Hishām, 1955, Ibn-Khaldūn, 1984, al-Ṭabarī, 1987, Ibn al-Athīr, 1994, al-Mas'ūdī, 2005). They tell how King Tubb' invaded Yathrib, but two Jewish rabbis (*Aḥbār*) visited his camp, held some talks with him and persuaded the king to stop the war and return to Yemen with his army because Yathrib might become the home of a Qurayshī prophet emigrating at a later time. Then King Tubb' took away both Jewish rabbis, who accompanied him on his journey back to Yemen and convinced him to convert to the Jewish faith. These sources also relate that King Tubb' adopted Judaism as the official religion of his country and undertook to spread it among the peoples of South Arabia. The two rabbis of Yathrib played a significant role in preaching about Judaism throughout the Ḥimyarite provinces, including the northern areas that included the Ḥimyarite region of Najrān, and as a result, the new religion received a significant number of converts among the peoples of South Arabia including Najrān, although others remained polytheists (al-Ya'qūbī, 1883, Ibn-Hishām, 1955, Ibn-Khaldūn, 1984, al-Ṭabarī, 1987, Ibn al-Athīr, 1994, al-Mas'ūdī, 2005). .

The authenticity of the King Tubb' story has been examined by a number of modern scholars. Wolfensohn (1927) and Ali (1993) argue that it represents a historical phase in which Judaism was adopted as the official religion of the Ḥimyarite kingdom, but not as the date of the arrival of

Judaism in the region. Both believe that Judaism had already become established before the reign of King Tubb', by suggesting two main causal factors: the existence of commercial connections between Yemen and Palestine and the immigration of Jewish groups to South Arabia due to Roman persecution.

Beeston (1984), however, has a different view to that of Wolfensohn and Ali, by considering that the story of King Tubb' Abū Kariba As'ad might refer to a conversion to the "Rahmanist cult", rather than to Judaism (p149). Meanwhile, Lecker (1995a) disagrees with this view by offering a fragment of this account, reported by a Kindite Jew living in the pre-Islamic and early Islamic periods and later preserved by al-Samhūdī (1972). According to Lecker, the story of King Tubb''s conversion to Judaism and his adoption of it as the official religion of the Ḥimyarite kingdom is very possibly correct, because one of those who told the story had received the details from his grandfather, a Kindite Jew who came from Yemen and later settled in Medina.

From an academic view of point, Lecker's conclusion seems to be closer to the facts of the story of the King Tubb' than Beeston's claim. In detail, the military campaign of King Tubb' Abū Kariba As'ad' to Yathrib is likely to have been a real historical event (despite perhaps containing some elements of legend), especially his debates with the two Jewish rabbis. An important inscription in the Dawādmī town in the middle west of Saudi Arabia at the moment records that King Tubb' Abū Kariba As'ad and his army, which consisted of several southern tribes, crossed through this place in his wars against some rebelling tribes and the Lakhmid kingdom in the north (Philby, 1950, al-'Amrī et al., 1990, Ali, 1993).

The text of the inscription clearly refers to political conflict, but the commercial factor was most probable present because of the increasing importance of the caravan route between the south and north of Arabia at that time. This all provides strong evidence for accepting the possibility of the invasion of Yathrib and Mecca by King Tubb' due to the commercial importance of both cities on the caravan route. In other words, the commercial factor appears to confirm the existence of Judaism in South Arabia in the reign of King Tubb'. As a result, the story of King Tubb' probably indicates the acknowledgement of Judaism as the official religion of the Ḥimyarites after many centuries in which the Jews were a minority and forms of polytheism remained the official religion.

The story of King Tubb' is seemingly in relation to a valuable account reported by the two Muslim historians al-Ya'qūbī (1883) and Ibn-Qūṭaybah (1981) about the spread of Judaism in the region of Najrān in particular, around the time of King Tubb''s reign. Both stated that Judaism gained a



number of converts during that time, particularly among the people of Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b. Unfortunately, neither of these Muslim historians provided many more details of the activities of the Jewish missionaries, the religious practices, or the extent of conversion to Judaism amongst the people of Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b. The account reported by these historians simply stipulates that “some of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b converted to Judaism”. (al-Ya‘qūbī, 1883, vol. 1, p 298, Ibn-Qutaybah, 1981, p 621)

This particular account leads to the suggestion that the number of converts to Judaism among the Najrānites appears to have been smaller than in other southern regions, mainly Ḥaḍramawt, ‘Adan, Ṣan‘ā, Zafār and Kinda, where Jews gradually formed a large proportion of the population. As evidence, the number of Jewish people in Najrān by the time of the invasion by the Ḥimyarite king around 518 CE was small, while the presence of Jews in Zafār, the capital of the Ḥimyarite kingdom, for example, seems to have been larger. The cause of this small number was perhaps because the activities of the Jewish missionaries in Najrān were limited in comparison to other southern Arabian regions. The small number of Jews of Najrān, however, most likely enjoyed political influence during this Ḥimyarite stage, due to the adoption of Judaism as the religion of the Ḥimyarite state. This may have been what led to the establishing of a real community for Jews in Najrān, with the appointment of clerics, building of synagogues and creation of religious education for the followers of Judaism in the region.

In sum, the existence of Judaism in Najrān, like other south Arabian regions, appears to have developed from ancient history prior to the sixth century CE to become one of the main communities in the religious structure of Najrān.

#### **4.3 The status of Najrānite Jews during the Pre-Islamic era**

During the time preceding the rise of Islam, the Jewish community of Najrān, as mentioned, passed through three main political reigns: Ḥimyarite, Abyssinian and Persian. These reigns affected several aspects of the presence of the Jews in Najrān, particularly the spread of Judaism among Najrānites, the practice of religion and the relationships between the Najrānite Jews and the society around them.

In the first quarter of the sixth century CE, the Najrānite Jewish community played a major role in the history of Najrān. Judaism was already an established influence, as can be seen from the

existence of several synagogues, particularly around the town centre (Moberg, 1924). According to *The Book of the Ḥimyarites* (Moberg, 1924) and *The Two Letters of Simeon* (Ya'qūb, 1966, Shahīd, 1971), these synagogues were under the rule of a number of Jewish rabbis who had come from Tiberias<sup>47</sup>. These accounts provide clear evidence of a connection between the Jews in Palestine and the Jewish community of Najrān which seems to have begun as far back as the fifth century CE, if not before. Moreover, the accounts given by *The Book of the Ḥimyarites* and *The Letters Two of Simeon* offer further evidence of the Jewish religious activities which these rabbis undertook, such as transmitting the Torah, teaching Hebrew and performing Jewish rituals of worship, which will be discussed in detail later (Moberg, 1924, Ya'qūb, 1966).

By the time of the invasion of Najrān by the Ḥimyarite king, Dhū Nuwās around 518 CE, Jews represented a major part of the multi-religious Najrānite society, in addition to Christians and polytheists (Moberg, 1924, Ya'qūb, 1966). Christian and Muslim accounts largely agree that the Najrānite Jews invoked the help of the Ḥimyarite king, which resulted in the persecution of Christians, but the difference here is in the details of the context of the story. The Christian version states that the dissemination of Christianity in Najrān created serious tensions with Judaism, and this resulted in violent actions against Jewish synagogues (Moberg, 1924, Ya'qūb, 1966). The Muslim accounts, however, do not refer to the destruction of Jewish synagogues, only indicating that a Najrānite Jew invoked King Dhū Nuwās because Christians had killed his sons (al-Azraqī, 1965, al-Fasawī, 1981, Ibn-Khaldūn, 1984, al-Ṭabarī, 1987, Ibn al-Athīr, 1994). Both Christian and Muslim accounts agree that Abyssinian military intervention was the most serious reaction to the persecution of Christians in Najrān, and that it led to the collapse of the kingdom of Ḥimyar and the death of its final ruler (Moberg, 1924, al-Azraqī, 1965, Ya'qūb, 1966, al-Fasawī, 1981, Ibn-Khaldūn, 1984, al-Ṭabarī, 1987, Ibrāhīm, 2007).

The circumstances of Najrānite Jews during the period of Abyssinian occupation has been an interesting question for recent research. The claim is that the Abyssinian campaign must have persecuted the Najrānite Jews and destroyed their synagogues, and may have dispersed them to many areas across Arabia (Shahīd, 1979, Aharoni and Ahituv, 2006, Berenbaum and Skolnik, 2007). For Tobi (1999), however, the lack of available information means that there is not a clear

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47 Tiberias, or *Ṭabaryyah* as it is termed in Arabic, is an ancient city located in north-east Palestine (al- Iṣṭakhrī, 1927, Ibn-Ḥawqal, 1938, Pahlitzsch, 2016).

picture of the circumstances of southern Arabian Jews under this new Christian rule. He agrees with Ali (1993) in considering that Judaism may have receded somewhat after the collapse of the Ḥimyarite kingdom, but not to the extent that Shahīd (1979) and Aharoni and Ahituv (2006) suggest, because Judaism in Najrān and other south Arabian towns alike maintained its existence among southern Arabian societies.

A valuable statement offered by the *Book of the Ḥimyarites* reveals some of the obscurity surrounding the status of Najrānite Jews under Abyssinian occupation (Moberg, 1924). This book reports further details on the arrival of the Abyssinian King Kālēb in Najrān after destroying the capital of the Kingdom of the Ḥimyarites, Zafār, and killing many Ḥimyarite Jews. In Najrān, most Jews survived the massacre because they tattooed their hands with the sign of the Cross. The book claims that the Abyssinian king understood this deception, but tolerated it, as he said: “Although these are not worthy of pity because they have crucified their Lord and murdered His servants, nevertheless, lest they should think that the victorious Cross is not a strong place of refuge and a deliverer from all evils to all who seek shelter by it, those who show on their hands the victorious sign of the Cross of our Saviour and Him who makes us victorious may live....” (Moberg, 1924, p. cxxxviii).

This statement clearly shows that the Abyssinians avoided further violent actions against the Jews of Najrān after the overthrow of the Ḥimyarite state.

Furthermore, *The Acts of Gregentios* gives a useful account about “The Laws of the Ḥimyarites”, suggested by the archbishop Gregentios himself (al-Na‘īm, 2000, Berger, 2006). Although the main focus of those Laws was on the social, administrative and political affairs of Najrān during the early Abyssinian occupation, there is useful information on religious matters concerning the Najrānite Jews in particular. The clauses of these laws dealt with Najrān as a Christian region, regardless of other non-Christians, mainly Jews and polytheists. In religious matters, the Laws state that all people must respect religious occasions and Sundays must be respected by stopping commercial activities. These laws, however, do not include specific terms that require Jews or other non-Christians to embrace Christianity. The logical conclusion that can be understood here is that the Jews of Najrān were perhaps subjected to forms of harassment in practising their religion and hence this could have been what led to the reduction in their numbers over the course of time. This Jewish community, however, remained part of the religious structure of Najrān, as will be seen in the following periods discussed below.

During the period of Persian existence in South Arabia, after 597 CE, the conditions for Jews seem to have improved and Najrān became a major centre for Judaism, in addition to the Ḥaḍramawt, Kinda and Ḥimyarite regions (al-Shujā‘, 1987, Piotrovskii, 1987, Abduly, 2011). Here, it is important to remember that Najrān itself enjoyed the semi-independent tribal rule of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b and their Christians allies, as discussed in Chapter Two (see sub-section 2.5.3). Under this rule, the Najrānite Jewish community led a peaceful life, as did Christians and polytheists (Dā’ūd, 1988, Dughaym, 1995, Abduly, 2011). Hence, they found in Najrān a suitable place to trade, practise crafts and engage in agricultural activities (Ali, 1993, Dughaym, 1995). As evidence, Ibn-Ḥabīb (1942) narrated a significant story of a commercial partnership between the nobles of Mecca, in particular ‘Abdul Muṭṭalib Ibn-Hāshim, the Prophet Muḥammad’s grandfather, and a Jewish trader from Najrān. This commercial partnership offers direct evidence for the commercial health of the Najrānite Jews during that time of pre-Islamic history. It can also be concluded that the positive stability gave Jews the freedom to worship in synagogues, hold religious festivals and perform religious rituals.

From the accounts above, it can be understood that Judaism had converts among the Najrānites in addition to possible non-Najrānite Jews coming to trade, and the presence of those Jewish people would have been in both the city centre and the rural areas. However, during the three different historical periods, when South Arabia was ruled in turn by Ḥimyarites, Abyssinians and Persians, the size of the Jewish community in Najrān apparently remained small in comparison to Christians and polytheists. Therefore, the political and religious impact of Judaism, in particular after the end of the Jewish Ḥimyarite state, was almost non-existent, as can clearly be seen in the dominance of the tribal polytheistic rule of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b and their allies in the Christian community. A possible explanation for this minimal impact is that the Jews of Najrān were not keen to disseminate the Jewish faith among the Najrānite people, but simply focused on economic activities such as trade, agriculture and banking interests, which helped them to develop their wealth.

It is thus reasonable to assume that the practice of such economic activities by Jewish people would have contributed to the growth of the Najrān economy, as noted in the rise of the Najrān market to become one of the most developed Arab markets during the pre-Islam time. As a result, it may also be assumed that the majority of Najrānites, in particular Christians and polytheists, positively accepted the existence of the Jewish community as a part of Najrān society in this particular period.

Thus, all these factors seem to have enabled the Jewish community to enjoy freedom in practising their religion.

Overall, the existence of Judaism in Najrān was influenced by the political conditions in South Arabia during the Ḥimyarite, Abyssinian and Persian phases of rule. However, Judaism maintained its existence despite the small number of its members.

#### **4.4 Najrānite Jews under Muslim rule**

Perhaps the first indication of the Jewish presence in Najrān in the Islamic era is given by Ibn-Jaʿfar (1981) and al-Balādhurī (1987), who give an important account of the Jews of Najrān concerning the first written covenant between the Prophet Muḥammad and a delegation by the Christian community of Najrān in 630 CE/ 9 AH. Both historians related that Najrānite Jews entered into the first written covenant together with the Christians but as subordinates of them (Ibn-Jaʿfar, 1981, al-Balādhurī, 1987). Unfortunately, neither writer provides any more details explaining, for example, that possibly Jewish representatives accompanied the Christian deputation to meet the Prophet Muḥammad or how those Najrānite Jews became subject to the Prophet Muḥammad's covenant. Nonetheless, in reading the details of this covenant, it is important to point out that the covenant specifically promises “to Najrān and their followers the protection of God (*Jiwār Allah*) and the pledge (*Dhimma*) of Muḥammad the Prophet...” (Ibn-Saʿad, n.d., Vol. 1, p287, Hamidullah, 1956, p93, Watt, 1965, p359, al-Ḥiwālī, 1976, p94, al-Balādhurī, 1987, p76, Morrow, 2013, p113). This particular statement means that all the terms of the covenant could include other communities living in Najrān in addition to the Christians. Thus, it can be confidently assumed that al-Balādhurī and Ibn-Jaʿfar mean in their statement that the Jewish community of Najrān enjoyed the same rights as those given to Christians in protecting houses of worship and freedom of religion and community authority in local matters, in return paying the *Jizyah*, which will be examined in detail in Chapter Six (see section 6.5).

The second account referring to the Jews of Najrān is offered by the Prophet Muḥammad's official decree to his first governor in Najrān, ʿAmr bin Ḥazm, in 631 CE / 10 AH (Ibn-Hishām, 1955, Ibn-Khaldūn, 1984, al-Ṭabarī, 1987). In this decree, the Prophet ordered ʿAmr bin Ḥazm to protect the religious freedoms of the Jews and in return collect the *Jizyah* (Ibn-Saʿad, n.d., Ibn-Hishām, 1955, Abū-Yūsuf, 1962). This decree confirms what is assumed above for the Jews of Najrān; namely, to

enjoy the same rights as those given to Christians in the protection of their properties and synagogues, and freedom of worship.

During the period of the Rashidun Caliphate (632-661 CE/ 11-40 AH), the available information about the Jews of Najrān remains very little. Muslim sources are still silent in relation to the Jews of Najrān until 641 CE / 20 AH when the second Caliph, 'Umar bin al-Khaṭṭāb evicted the Christians from Najrān and expelled them to al-Kūfa in Mesopotamia. Muslim historians such as al-Balādhurī (1987), al-Ṭabarī (1987) and Ibn al-Athīr (1994) report that an unspecified number of the Jewish community were also driven out of Najrān and were compensated with new properties in a town near al-Kūfa, known later as Najrāniyyat al-Kūfa. This valuable reference provides evidence to presume that the status of the Najrānite Jews seems to have been one of peaceful enjoyment of religious freedom and the practice of economic activities as a non-Muslim community. Here, it is noticeable that the available information from Muslim sources about the role of Najrānite Jews through Muslim sources is generally not large unlike the details by the same sources about the Christian presence in the region. This gives further evidence for the previous suggestion about the Jewish influence in Najrān remaining limited, representing a small Jewish community.

Overall, it is clear that the existence of Jews in Najrān was impacted by the Muslim rule, which offered them a measure of acceptance and religious tolerance similar to that given to Christians. However, the existence of Judaism still receded during the early Islamic era due to the expulsion of a number of its followers, as will be discussed in detail in Chapter Six (see sub-section 6.5.6).

#### **4.5 The main aspects of Jewish religious life**

The major problem faced in this chapter is the lack of information about the Jewish religious life in Najrān. This may be due to the focus of available sources on the political history rather than on the religious aspects and the history of the Najrānite Jews itself. Therefore, it is necessary to read most of the religious aspects of the Najrānite Jews in the context of their religious relationships with Jewish communities in Palestine and al-Ḥijāz as well as with nearby Yemenite Jewish communities, which can provide the necessary religious references (Abū Jabal, 1999). As already mentioned, there were two missions of Jewish rabbis: the first was from al-Ḥijāz, at the time of the Ḥimyarite King Tubb' Abū Kariba As'ad at the beginning of the fifth century CE, and the second was from Palestine, in particular from Tiberias, at the time of the last Ḥimyarite Jewish King, Dhū Nuwās.

These missions established religious relationships which resulted in an impact on most aspects of the Najrānite Jews' religious life: their religious organisation, beliefs and rituals of worship, as will be discussed below.

#### **4.5.1 Religious organisation**

The Jews of Najrān, like south Arabian Jews, had their religious organisation in their schools of thought, places of worship and leaders of religion. Some Christian sources shed some light on this question when speaking about the Jewish-Christian conflict in Najrān. The first direct report of their religious activities is given in *The Book of the Ḥimyarites* and *The Letters of Simeon* (Moberg, 1924, Ya'qūb, 1966, Shahīd, 1971). These sources report significant details concerning the journeys of Jewish rabbis from Tiberias to Najrān in the reign of the Ḥimyarite Jewish King Dhū Nuwās, bringing holy books (the Torah and the Talmud) and establishing synagogues, before the Jewish-Christian struggle which occurred around 518 CE (Moberg, 1924, Ya'qūb, 1966, Shahīd, 1971).

These Christian accounts show significant missionary activities by Palestinian rabbis preaching Judaism among the Najrānites, which may have continued until the end of the Ḥimyar kingdom. These missionary activities were most likely supported by the Ḥimyarite rule to face the growth of Christianity in the region. This support can be understood in light of the fact that Christianity represented an aspect of the Byzantine-Abyssinian influence which was an aggressive one in relation to the Ḥimyarite kingdom. Despite the Ḥimyarite political support for Jewish missionary works, therefore, Judaism could not largely be propagated amongst Najrānites, unlike Christianity. This may be due to the fact that the previous Jewish mission in the reign of King Tubb' could not gain many converts to Judaism, as suggested earlier. Another reason that can be assumed here is that Jewish missionary works appear to have receded, particularly during Christian Abyssinian rule in Yemen. This may provide a logical answer as to why the Jews of Najrān were few in comparison to the Christians and polytheists. However, it may be suggested that the arrival of Jewish rabbis from either Tiberias or Yathrib must have exerted considerable influence on the religious structure of Jewish people in Najrān.

The first influence can be read through *The Martyrdom of Aretha* (Ibrāhīm, 2007) which states that the Jews of South Arabia, including their co-religionists in Najrān, were divided into two main

schools, Pharisees<sup>48</sup> and Sadducees,<sup>49</sup> when the Ḥimyarite Jewish King, Dhū Nuwās invaded Najrān. This account clearly reflects the important impact brought by Tiberian rabbis to South Arabia, including Najrān, due to the fact that most Jewish religious schools originated in ancient Palestine where Tiberias is located (Deines, 2006a, Deines, 2006b). This division, however, did not appear to lead to a major split amongst the south Arabian Jews and Najrānite Jews in particular. It probably remained in religious thought amongst Jewish individuals rather than affecting the structure of the Jewish community itself or its leaders of religion.

The second aspect of influence can be seen in the construction of Jewish houses of worship, commonly known as synagogues. Some Christian sources report on the establishment of a number of synagogues by rabbis coming from Tiberias to the inhabitants of Najrān at the beginning of the sixth century CE, before the struggle with the Christians, but nothing is known of the status or practices of these synagogues after the Abyssinian invasion, and even though both *The Martyrdom of Aretha* (Ibrāhīm, 2007) and *The Book of the Ḥimyarites* (Moberg, 1924) report some details of what the Abyssinian King Kālēb did after he took over Najrān, neither source says anything about the Jewish synagogues. Nonetheless, despite the absence of information about the synagogues or what was practised in them, Abū Jabal (1999) suggests that Jewish synagogues in South Arabia represented the main spiritual centre of worship for performing daily prayer, reciting the Torah and holding religious events.

Additionally, Muslim sources talk of another type of Jewish religious house for studying Judaism, particularly in al-Ḥijāz. They term it *Bayt al-Madāris* or “The House of Schools”, in which Jews studied different topics related to Judaism, such as theological studies of holy books, biographies of the prophets and messengers, and Jewish history (Ibn-Hishām, 1955, al-Ṭabarī, 1987, al-Bukhārī, 1997). Furthermore, these houses of schools played another role in addition to their religious function. They were the best places for Jews to meet, discuss and reach decisions on political issues (Ibn-Hishām, 1955, al-Ṭabarī, 1987, al-Bukhārī, 1997). Unfortunately, the available sources say nothing about the existence of this type of place of worship among Jewish communities in South

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48 The Pharisees were a religious-political school of thought, probably established in the first century CE. They have been described as adopting a radical approach that called for maintaining the origins of Moses’ tradition (Deines, 2006a).

49 The Sadducees were a Jewish political and religious party established in Palestine in the second century BCE. This party was in contrast to the Pharisees because of its rejection of the concepts of afterlife, fate, evil and angels as well as not accepting all parts of Torah (Deines, 2006b).



Arabia. However, Ḥijāzī Jewish rabbis in the time of King Tubb', as referred to earlier, may have introduced this type of Jewish place of worship. The missionary activities of these rabbis, which established real Jewish communities in South Arabia, would have had additional impacts on their faith. The places of worship seem to have had a major impact, due to the importance given to practising rituals. Therefore, the establishing of this type of *Bayt al-Madāris* probably occurred, albeit they may have been few in comparison to the synagogues.

The third important impact can be noted in the religious organisation of Judaism in Najrān, which was headed by religious leaders. Abū Jabal (1999) suggests that Jewish religious leaders among south Arabian Jews took over the administration of most religious affairs, such as the interpretation of the holy books, intercession with Jehovah, and the application of Jewish law and guidance concerning the performance of rituals (Abū Jabal, 1999). This suggestion raises an essential question here about the development and roles of the Jewish religious leaders in the religious life of the Najrānite Jewish community as well as the ranks of those Jewish leaders. The first accounts regarding this question are given by *The Letters of Simeon* and *The Book of the Ḥimyarites* (Moberg, 1924, Ya'qūb, 1966, Shahīd, 1971). They state that the supervision of the religious organisation of Najrānite Jews was conducted by Tiberian rabbis until the Abyssinian occupation of South Arabia around 525 CE (Moberg, 1924, Ya'qūb, 1966, Shahīd, 1971). These sources provide direct evidence for the great influence of Palestinian Jews on their Najrānite co-religionists, which is probable to have continued during the period under study.

Another valuable account supplied by *The Acts of Gregentios* (Berger, 2006) speaks about an interfaith dialogue between the archbishop Gregentios and the Jewish rabbi Herban that took place during the Abyssinian existence in Najrān. The account of this dialogue reflects aspects of the rabbi's role, as can be noted in his debate on theological issues with the Christian archbishop.

The dialogue account implies that the rabbi Herban was a representative of his Jewish followers in political issues when he negotiated the Abyssinian rule in relation to the situation of his followers. That means that the influence of Jewish leaders was not only on religious issues. They may have practised other roles in political and social matters concerning Jewish communities in South Arabia. This account shows that Jews in South Arabia enjoyed religious leadership despite the domination by the Christian Abyssinians in the region.

The ranking of religious leaders in the Najrānite Jewish community appears to have been similar to that of other Jewish communities across Arabia, particularly in the south. In this respect, Darādikah

(1992), Abū Jabal (1999) and Tobi (1999) regard the term *Aḥbār* as the most common one for Jewish leaders among the Jews of Arabia during the pre-Islamic and early Islamic eras. This view differs slightly from what can be understood from Muslim sources. More clearly, it seems that the two terms *cohen* and *Aḥbār* occasionally refer to Jewish leaders of religion in general, rather than to a specific class (al-Ya‘qūbī, 1883, Ibn-Hishām, 1955, Ibn-Durayd, 1991). This is significantly similar to the state of the Najrānite Jews who knew about rabbis (*Aḥbār*), priests (*cohen*) and scholars (Moberg, 1924, Ya‘qūb, 1966, Berger, 2006).

However, an evaluation of the categories of Jewish leaders of religion shows significant differences between these terms. For Najrānite Jews, leaders of religion may, like the Jews of Yemen and al-Ḥijāz, have consisted of two main classes, jurist and scholar (Ali, 1993). In the Qur’an, both terms are mentioned: “Surely We revealed the Torah, wherein there is guidance and light. Thereby did Prophets – who had submitted themselves (to Allah) judge for the Judaized folk; and so, did the scholars and jurists. They judged by the Book of Allah for they had been entrusted to keep it, and bear witness to it. So (O Jews!) do not fear men but fear Me, and do not barter away My signs for a trivial gain. Those who do not judge by what Allah has revealed are indeed the unbelievers” (Sūrat al-Mā’ida, 34).

Ali (1993) interprets the Qur’anic account by examining the difference in rabbinic authority for each class. He observes that the jurist class must understand prohibition and allowance, be the arbiters of disputes, give guidance in rituals and lead worshippers in prayer, whereas the scholar needs to be an expert in Jewish law, history and culture, and to publicly teach Jews in houses of worship (Ali, 1993). Wolfensohn (1927) puts forward this view in the light of the following Qur’anic verse: “Why is it that their scholars and jurists do not forbid them from sinful utterances and devouring unlawful earnings? Indeed, they have been contriving evil” (Sūrat al-Mā’ida, 63). He assumes that this verse is clear evidence that Jewish rabbis had complete control over most religious and secular matters, and considers this term *Haber* to be the common nickname for every Jew with a deep knowledge of Jewish religion, whether scholar or jurist (Wolfensohn, 1927).

When considering the previous views in the case of the south Arabian rabbi Herban, as presented by *The Acts of Gregentios* (Berger, 2006), he seems to be close to Wolfensohn’s assumption because he was entirely a jurist on theological issues and a leader of his community at the same time. It appears that ranks, terms and responsibilities of religious leaders in the Najrānite Jewish community did not differ from those of other Jewish communities in the Arabian Peninsula in the period under

study. In other words, *Aḥbār* was apparently the most common name for both jurists and scholars amongst Najrānite Jews, as it was for other Arabian Jews in that period.

The fourth impact can be seen in the adoption of the Torah and the Talmud as the major sources of legislation for Jewish communities from early times. This brought the Hebrew language to South Arabia, with the spread of Judaism in that area. Epigraphic research by Philby (1952) shows that Hebrew inscriptions were discovered on several mountains south and south east of Najrān, probably dating back to antiquity. These inscriptions offer evidence for the early arrival of the Hebrew language in Najrān and support the suggestion of large amounts of Jewish Scripture being brought by those Jewish rabbis who came from Tiberias (Moberg, 1924). During the early decades of Islam, copies of the Torah written in Hebrew were disseminated among the Jews of South Arabia, as seen in the case of Kaʿb al-Aḥbār<sup>50</sup>, who claimed to own a pure copy of the Torah (al-Dhahabī, 1981). This provides another possible piece of evidence of the use of Hebrew among the Jews of South Arabia, including their co-religionists in Najrān, despite the scant information of other examples of Hebrew being used among those Jews. In short, it can be assumed that Arabic probably remained the primary language in public among the Najrānite Jews, whilst Hebrew was required in prayers, for reading the Torah, and for religious education (Wolfensohn, 1927, Ali, 1993).

In sum, there seems to be a considerable influence by Tiberian rabbis in establishing the religious structure of the Jews of Najrān that is represented in schools of religious thought, places of worship, leaders of Judaism and the learning of holy books.

#### **4.5.2 Religious beliefs**

In religious thought, the same problem of the lack of information can be seen here because of there are no specific details concerning the religious thought of the Jews of Najrān.

The interfaith dialogue between the archbishop Gregentios and the Jewish rabbi Herban shed light on major issues regarding the holy books, old prophets and the Prophethood of Jesus Christ (Berger, 2006). Despite the account of this dialogue being shrouded by elements of legend by mentioning miracles, its importance can be assumed in the focus of this dialogue on major issues between Christianity and Judaism. The dispute over these issues is well known and does not differ from the

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<sup>50</sup> A Yemenite Jewish scholar who converted to Islam in the reign of ʿUmar bin al-Khaṭṭāb and died around 652 CE in Syria (Ibn-Saʿad, n.d., Ilyās, 2007, Wolfensohn, 2008).

present, as can be seen in the debates on the Prophethood of Jesus and old prophets, and the truth of the New Testament and Old Testament (Berger, 2006).

Later, most these issues were argued between the Prophet Muḥammad and the Jews of Medina, especially concerning angels, old prophets, creation of earth and heaven, Prophethood of Muḥammad and holy books (Sūrat al-‘Imrān, 72, Sūrat al-Mā’ida, 59, al-Ṭabarī, 1987, al-Suhaylī, 2000). In total, the views can be summarised as the non-recognition of non-Jewish prophets, particularly Jesus and Muḥammad, and the rejection of any holy books other than the Torah and Talmud.

The biography of the Yemenite Jewish rabbi Ka‘b al-Aḥbār provides information to assist in understanding the rituals and beliefs of southern Arabian Jews, including the Najrānite Jews (Ibn-Sa‘ad, n.d., al-Bukhārī, 1941, al-Mizzī, 1980a, al-Ṭabarī, 1995, Ibn-Ḥajar, 2010). Ka‘b al-Aḥbār and his father were great religious leaders for most Jewish communities in South Arabia, including the Najrānite Jews, during pre-Islamic and early Islamic times and he described interesting theological issues from a Jewish perspective, such the creation of Adam and Eve, the story of the Prophet Ibrahim’s sacrifice of Isaac, and holy books, angels and old prophets (al-Ya‘qūbī, 1883, Ibn-Shabbah, 1979, al-Ṭabarī, 1987, al-Jāhiz, 2003).

The similarity between the three above accounts (the Gregentios-Herban dialogue, the Prophet Muḥammad and Jews of Medina debates, and the Ka‘b al-Aḥbār biography) provide evidence to suggest that the Jews of Najrān did not differ from other Jewish communities either in South Arabia or al-Ḥijāz, in adopting the same theological beliefs in Prophethood, creation and holy books.

#### **4.5.3 Rituals of worship**

For rituals of worship, the available knowledge concerning the Jews of South Arabia is extremely limited, due to the focus of Muslim sources on the Jews of al-Ḥijāz. Nonetheless, modern research shows that whether they were from al-Ḥijāz, South Arabia or anywhere else, Jews did not differ in the performance of their rituals of prayer, fasting and so on (al-Hawārī, 1988, Ali, 1993, Abū Jabal, 1999).

Muslim scholars such as al-Qaṣṭallānī (1996), al-Bukhārī (1997) and Ibn al-Athīr (1997) related that Jewish people in al-Ḥijāz used to fast on the Day of Ashura<sup>51</sup>. They named this day *Yaūm Kippūr* or the *Kafārah* Day (the Day of Atonement). Traditionally, the Jews of Arabia would fast on the Day of Ashura from sunrise until sunset (Dā'ūd, 1988, Ali, 1993). On this day, the great rabbi (or the high priests) went into the synagogues to perform the special prayers of *Yaūm Kippūr* (al-Qaṣṭallānī, 1996). Ali (1993) deduces that the fast of *Yaūm Kippūr* amounted to an abstinence from food, drink, intercourse with women and unacceptable speech. Similarly to other Jews, the Arabian Jews maintained Saturday as a sacred day. On this day, it is not permitted for Jews to do any kind of work; it must be a day of rest (Dā'ūd, 1988, Ali, 1993).

Additionally, circumcision was a well-known tradition among the Najrānite Jews, as with their co-religionists across Arabia (Darādīkah, 1992, Ali, 1993). Wolfensohn (1927) states that this ritual has a clear origin in the Jewish faith, that a new-born male child must be circumcised. He also states, however, that this custom may have come from an ancient practice, as circumcision was also common among Arab polytheists in pre-Islamic times (Wolfensohn, 1927). Indeed, it was a traditional custom throughout Arab societies and other peoples of the Near East for many centuries (al-Jāḥiẓ, 1964, Ibn 'Abd-Rabbih, 1965). In other words, circumcision is not exclusive to the Jewish religion, as it is also a common ritual for most pre-Islamic Arabs and Muslims.

The postponement is another significant ritual that was practised among Arabian Jews (al-Bīrūnī, n.d.). The performance of it is based on the idea that the religious leader has the authority to postpone the aligning of the lunar calendar with the solar calendar; in other words, the procedure of Jewish postponement can be described as the addition, performed by a religious leader of the community, of seven lunar months to nineteen lunar years, to equal nineteen solar years (Exodus, 34: 31, Wolfensohn, 1927, Darādīkah, 1992). This ritual is similar to that of *Nasī'* which was a common custom among Arab polytheists during the pre-Islamic era. Therefore, al-Bīrūnī (n.d.) sees that pre-Islamic Arabs might learnt of *Nasī'* from the Jewish postponement, due to the similarity of both ideas in setting the solar calendar. The impact of Jews on *Nasī'* was possible, especially in counting the calendar, but the main purpose of *Nasī'* is slightly different, as it represents the time of Ḥajj.

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<sup>51</sup> The Day of Ashura ('Āshūrā' as it is called in Arabic) is believed to have been the tenth day of the first month in the Islamic calendar of today (Campo, 2009).

Regarding prayer, available information is still scarce, but Ibn-Hishām (1955) provides some important details on the practice of this ritual among the Jews of al-Ḥijāz. They prayed three times a day in the direction (*Qiblā*) of Jerusalem (*Bayt al-Maqdis*) (Ibn-Hishām, 1955). Moreover, according to the south Arabian rabbi Kaʿb al-Aḥbār, the prayer for rain was a common ritual amongst south Arabian and al-Ḥijāz Jews (al-Yaʿqūbī, 1883, al-Jāḥiz, 1964, al-Ṭabarī, 1987). When calling to prayer, Arabian Jews did not differ from other Jewish worshippers in using the *Shofār* to call people to come to the synagogue (al-Qasṭallānī, 1996). Here, it is important to note that such daily prayers or special prayers were originally part of the rituals of worship of Judaism from ancient times (Elmessiri, 1999).

The above accounts thus provide indirect information on the performance of types of prayer among Najrānite Jews. They seem to have been similar to other Jewish communities in adopting the same rites of prayers such as practising prayer in synagogues, calling for prayer by *Shofār* or even performing forms of prayer, daily and special.

All the preceding details show that forms of fasting, prayer and religious celebration were probably common amongst Najrānite Jews, as they were for other Jewish communities in Arabia or even in the Near East during the period under study. This view is based on the historical accounts that the establishment of Jewish community in Najrān was by both Jews of al-Ḥijāz and then Jewish rabbis from Palestine who presumably brought their religious traditions into the worship rituals.

In short, in spite of the scant information provided by the available sources, it can be suggested that Najrānite Jews would not have differed from their co-religionists in al-Ḥijāz and South Arabia on the key issues of Jewish religion: religious organisation, beliefs and rituals of worship.

#### **4.6 Conclusion**

The date of the arrival of Judaism in Najrān is a controversial issue, but it seems to have developed over a long period of time in which the number of Jews was small, until King Tubbʿ acknowledged Judaism as the official religion for the Ḥimyarites, including the region of Najrān. During the period under study, the conditions of the Jews of Najrān were often impacted by the political situation in South Arabia. That can be seen in the receding of Najrānite Judaism under Abyssinian occupation whereas it improved during the Persian existence when Najrān enjoyed a fair amount of political independence under tribal rule, prior to the advent of Islam.

During the early Islamic era, the situation of Najrānite Jews was regulated by Muslim rules for non-Muslims. These rules offered Jews a measure of the freedom of religious practice and the protection of property and life.

With regard to the main aspects of religious life, although there is little information available on that of Najrānite Jews, it is clear that Judaism was influenced by the two Jewish communities in Palestine and al-Ḥijāz. Both communities obviously played a significant role in establishing a real Jewish community in Najrān in terms of religious organisation, beliefs and rituals of worship. The role of Palestinian rabbis appears to have had an impact, by establishing a real religious identity for the Najrānite Jews during the first quarter of the sixth century CE and possibly afterwards. That influence of the Palestinian rabbis can be assumed from the building of houses of worship, the allocation of leaders of religion and the bringing of holy books. This influence can be suggested by the existence of followers of the two school of religious thought, the Pharisees and Sadducees, and also in the references to their religious leaders by the name *Aḥbār*.

The Jews of Najrān, like other Arabian Jews, seemingly adopted the most common beliefs on the major arguable issues with Christianity and Islam such as the concept of creation, old prophets and the Prophethood of Jesus Christ and Muḥammad. Besides, the performance of the main rituals in Judaism such as prayer, fasting, religious celebrations and circumcision was probably similar to what other Jewish communities practised at that time.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Christianity: Origins, Places of Worship, Doctrines, Theological Concepts, Clergy and Rituals of Worship**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

Before addressing the religious structure of the Christians of Najrān, it is useful to begin by investigating the arrival of Christianity in Najrān to understand the circumstances behind this arrival. The discussion will then be divided into five main sections. It will firstly present the places of worship in relation to types, terms used and location, while paying special attention to the question of the Ka‘ba of Najrān.

The research will next investigate the doctrines of Najrānite Christians during the period under study, by examining the development of the doctrinal history of Christianity in Najrān from the period of Abyssinian rule in South Arabia, which began around 525 CE, until the arrival of Islam. It will then address the theological conceptions of Najrānite Christians toward major issues in religion such as the Christology of Jesus, creation, Prophethood, Paradise and Hellfire.

The fourth section will focus on the Christian clergy of Najrān, in relation to holy orders, classifications, development, local terms used and responsibilities. The final section will highlight the most important rituals of worship described by the available Christian and Muslim sources. The discussion will focus on four main rituals – baptism, prayer, pilgrimage and monasticism – by evaluating their rites, types, rules and places of practising such rituals.

#### **5.2 Origins of Christianity in Najrān**

The story of the arrival of Christianity in Najrān is shrouded in controversy in both Muslim and Christian sources. This controversy can be seen through arguments concerning particular issues, such as the approximate date of its arrival, the country from which Christianity came to Najrān, and the first person to evangelise on behalf of the Christian faith in Najrān.

In eastern Christian sources, the oldest date is claimed by Ibn-Mattā (1896), who stated that Mār Mārī (Saint Mari), one of the 70 evangelists who dispersed soon after the time of Jesus Christ, preached Christianity in Arab lands amongst nomads, including in Yemen and Najrān. Eusebius



(1998)<sup>52</sup> differently stated that Pantaenus, a philosopher from an Alexandrian School of Faith, was sent to “India”<sup>53</sup>. When he arrived there, he found that people in that country already believed in Christ, and they showed him a copy of the Gospel of Matthew written in Hebrew, which had been brought by the apostle Bartholomew around the second century CE. Philostorgius (2007) claimed that the people of Najrān embraced the Christian faith in the reign of the emperor Constantius II (337-361 CE), when the emperor sent a mission to the Kingdom of Ḥimyar, headed by the Arian monk Theophilus, to receive permission from the Ḥimyarite king for the construction of several churches in Zafār, ‘Aden and the entrance to the Gulf of Arabia. Subsequently, Theophilus began to send evangelists to towns in Greater Arabia, including Najrān, and Christianity arrived in this way (Philostorgius, 2007).

These Christian accounts have been evaluated by modern researchers in the light of the impact of Christianity on the main cities of the Ḥimyarite kingdom including Najrān. Shahīd (1989) and Abū Jawdah (1997) think that this mission could not have established a community of Christians in parts of the Ḥimyarite kingdom, because southern Arabian inscriptions say nothing about the Christian faith, and only contain polytheistic invocations. In concordance with this, Papathanassiou (1993) supposes that the accounts narrated through church history may refer to several ephemeral attempts to spread Christianity, rather than the beginnings of a significant presence, until the early part of the fifth century CE, when the establishment of Christian churches is well documented.

In fact, there is considerable disagreement between the above Christian sources on the details of the arrival of Christianity in Najrān. This does not merely relate to the approximate date of this arrival, but also includes other major issues, such as the identity of the first preacher to reach Najrān, the country of origin from which Christianity came to Najrān, and the first form of Christian doctrine that arrived in Najrān. This disagreement may itself reflect several attempts by different preachers and Christian traders to spread Christianity in Najrān, rather than the establishment of a single successful presence. These attempts seem to have been the result of the growing commercial importance of Najrān as a major station on the incense route during the fifth and sixth centuries.

The two Nestorian Christian sources *The Chronicle of Seert* (Scher, 1907) and Ibn-Sulaymān (1899) provide another version for the introduction of Christianity to Najrān. Both tell that a Najrānite

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52 Eusebius of Caesarea was a Greek historian of the early church and a bishop of Caesarea city, lived between 260-339 CE, (Jörg, 2011).

53 The author clearly means South Arabia because of mentioning the Ḥimyarites.

trader called Ḥayyān travelled to Constantinople to trade, before going on to al-Ḥīra, during the reign of the Sasanian emperor Yazdegerd I <sup>54</sup> (Ibn-Sulaymān, 1899, Scher, 1907). The story states that Ḥayyān saw how the Christians of al-Ḥīra prayed and worshipped, and was converted to Christianity and baptised in one of the churches in al-Ḥīra. After returning to Najrān, Ḥayyān invited his family and other Najrānites to join his religion and Christianity spread among many people in Najrān and the near regions of Ḥimyar (Ibn-Sulaymān, 1899, Scher, 1907).

Moberg (1924) and Shahīd (1989) lean towards accepting the Nestorian Christian version of how Christianity reached Najrān. Moberg (1924) points out that this version apparently draws upon *The Book of the Ḥimyarites*, and Shahīd (1989) believes that the reference to Ḥayyān is enough evidence to assume that *The Book of the Ḥimyarites* (Moberg, 1924) is the original source of the missing information narrating the full account the introduction of Christianity to Najrān. As a result, Shahīd considers Ḥayyān as an apostle of Christianity, carrying out missionary activities not only in Najrān but also in other lands across the Ḥimyarite kingdom. Shahīd also makes a strong case for the importance of commercial factors in the spread of Christianity to Najrān, since it became a great trading hub, and Ḥayyān himself travelled to al-Ḥīra as a merchant.

There is also an Abyssinian version of how Christianity reached Najrān, which states that the priest Azkir established a new church there and had baptised 38 Christians in Najrān by the second half of the fifth century CE (Budge, 1928). Beeston (2005) examines this version in the light of the Abyssinian influence in South Arabia during the period preceding the Abyssinian invasion of Yemen around 525 CE, and concludes that this version refers to early Abyssinian missionary activities. Beeston's conclusion is most likely to be correct, due to the considerable presence of Abyssinians, even before their occupation of South Arabia from 525 CE. This Abyssinian presence appears in the list of the martyred Najrānites, which includes the names of Abyssinian clerics (Moberg, 1924, Ya'qūb, 1966, Shahīd, 1971, Ibrāhīm, 2007). This early presence might be in relation to the commercial importance of Najrān as an open marketplace, as explained in Chapter Two (see section 2.4).

In Muslim sources, there are two similar versions of the arrival of Christianity in Najrān. In the first version, early historians such as Ibn-Hishām (1955), Ibn-Qūṭaybah (1981) and al-Mas'ūdī (1981)

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54 Yazdegerd I was a king of the Sasanian Persian Empire, reigned from 399 to 420 CE (al-Iṣfahānī, 1961, Daryaei, 2014).

related that Christianity was brought by a Christian ascetic called Faymiyūn (Phemion), who came from Syria to Arabia to work as a builder and was later kidnapped and sold in Najrān as a slave. At that time, the people of Najrān worshipped a great palm. Faymiyūn became known throughout Najrān for his spirituality, goodness and piety, and his owner became impressed with Faymiyūn's religion. This owner, along with other Najrānites, converted to Christianity and asked Faymiyūn to perform a miracle on the palm tree. Faymiyūn prayed to God to remove it, at which point a strong wind uprooted the palm, leading many Najrānites to embrace Christianity.

However, al-Azraqī (1965) and al-Ṭabarī (1987) reported another account that contains minor differences. Both narrated that the people of Najrān were polytheists, worshipping idols, when the Najrānite noble al-Thāmir asked a sorcerer to teach magic to his son, 'Abdullah ibn al-Thāmir. This son then passed by a man called Faymiyūn who lived in a small tent near the town. 'Abdullah saw how Faymiyūn performed his acts of worship, in particular prayer and acts of devotion. According to al-Ṭabarī (1987), "'Abdullah ibn al-Thāmir began to sit with him and listen to him, until he surrendered himself to God (*aslam*), acknowledged God's unity, and worshipped Him" (vol. 2, p, 200). 'Abdullah ibn al-Thāmir then began to preach Christianity among his people in the city of Najrān, which spread and began to overtake polytheism in popularity. Because of this, ibn al-Thāmir was summoned by the king, who had him executed for his faith. However, by this point most Najrānites had converted to Christianity, immediately before the persecution of the Najrānite Christians.

The two Muslim versions are discussed by Moberg (1924) in the light of the persecution of Christians of Najrān: he does not regard these as significant, because there is much accordance with accounts reported by the *Book of the Ḥimyarites* such as the introduction of Christianity to Najrān, the character of the Ḥimyarite Jewish king and the Abyssinian intervention in Yemen. Thus, the Muslim versions of the story may be based on Christian sources, rather than giving separate independent versions, Moberg claims. Abū Jawdah (1997) agrees with Moberg's suggestion by claiming that the narration reported by Ibn-Hishām is specifically based on Nestorian Christian accounts. Ibn-Jrais (2004) clearly doubts the credibility of the Muslim versions, and assumes that the spread of Christianity to Najrān perhaps preceded the date proposed by Muslims versions (around 518 CE) due to the influence of Byzantine missionary work in sending Christian evangelists to South Arabia and their role in the establishment of several churches in Ṣafar, Aden, Najrān and other southern Arabian metropolises.

The claims of Moberg (1924), Abū Jawdah (1997) and Ibn-Jrais (2004) can be examined in the light of the identities of the early narrators who offered the first details of the arrival of Christianity in Najrān and were used by later Muslim historians, especially Ibn-Hishām, al-Azraqī and al-Ṭabarī. These historians mention that their sources were local people living in South Arabia and al-Ḥijāz, mainly Muḥammad bin Kaʿb al-Qarāzī<sup>55</sup>, Wahb ibn Munabbih<sup>56</sup>, Yazīd bin Ziyād and some Najrānites. Interestingly, al-Azraqī's account mostly relies on a different narrator, ʿAbdullah bin al-ʿAbbās,<sup>57</sup> who reported substantially similar details.

These narrators show no significant contradictions concerning the general context of the arrival of Christianity in Najrān, although there are minor differences relating to the identity of the first Najrānite convert to Christianity. The first Muslim version, reported by Ibn-Hishām (1955), Ibn-Qūṭaybah (1981) and al-Masʿūdī (1981), did not provide the name of the first Christian convert, whereas al-Azraqī (1965) and al-Ṭabarī (1987) version names him as ʿAbdullah ibn al-Thāmir. The Muslim narrators are in agreement on details concerning the king responsible for persecuting the early Christians, the location of the incident, the approximate date of the arrival of Christianity and the religious identity of the persecuted community. Thus, the two Muslim versions seem to be very close, and possibly derive from a single origin. It is true that they may contain some misrepresentations, exaggerations and legends, but this is possibly due to the reliance of these Muslim historians on the oral transmission of stories relating to the arrival of Christianity in Najrān, as debated in Chapter One (see sub-section 1.2.4). As a result, the two Muslim versions can be said to be independent accounts, were reported by local Najrānite and Yemenite narrators, which unlike the Christian sources and the views of Moberg (1924), Abū Jawdah (1997) and Ibn-Jrais (2004).

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55 Muḥammad bin Kaʿb al-Qarāzī was attributed to the Jewish tribe Banū Qurayza and his family converted to Islam in the life of the Prophet Muḥammad. He was known as a scholar of *Tafsīr* and narrator of *Ḥadīth* and history, and died between 108 and 118 AH / 726-736 CE (Ibn-Saʿad, n.d., Ibn-Ḥibbān, 1973, Ibn-al-Athīr, 1994).

56 Wahb ibn Munabbih ibn Kamil al-Ṣanaʿanī al-Dhimarī, a famous Yemenite scholar, was descended from a Persian father. He was born around 34 AH / 655 CE and educated from childhood in religious studies and history until he became a prominent scholar in the Qurʾan, *Tafsīr*, *Fiqh* and history. He died around 110 AH / 728 CE when he was in ninety years old (Ibn-Saʿad, n.d., al-Bukhārī, 1941, Ibn-al-Athīr, 1994).

57 ʿAbdullāh bin al-ʿAbbās was a cousin of the Prophet Muḥammad. He was born around 618 CE, converted to Islam when he was young and later became one of the most prominent scholars of early Islam. He was one of the supporters of Caliph ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, but when the caliph was martyred, ʿAbdullāh bin al-ʿAbbās moved to al-Ṭāʾif and spent the rest of his life until his death in 687 CE / 68 AH (al-Balādhurī, 1996, Ibn-Ḥajar, 2010).

Regarding the similarity between the Nestorian Christian and Muslim versions, it is true that there are important similarities between these, as Moberg and Abū Jawdah mention, particularly the identity of the persecutor as the Ḥimyarite Jewish king. However, there are also major contradictions between these versions, in particular concerning the identity of the first Christian preacher: whether he is the Najrānite trader Ḥayyān, according to the Nestorian Christian version, or the Syrian preacher Faymiyūn, as suggested by Muslim historians. This lack of agreement also extends to the country from which the first preacher came, whether it was al-Ḥīra in Mesopotamia, as claimed in the Nestorian version, or Syria, as Muslim historians believed. Therefore, the claims by Moberg and Abū Jawdah that Muslim sources relied exclusively on Nestorian Christian sources are not supported here.

From an analysis of the different stories mentioned above, it seems reasonable to suppose that the differences between the Nestorian, Abyssinian and Muslim versions probably reflect the intensive missionary activities practised by a number of Christian preachers, rather than by one single person. This general surge in missionary activity may be due to Christian economic interest in Najrān as an important commercial centre located on the incense trade route. This interest grew throughout the first half of the fifth century CE, and the spread of Christianity may have represented an ideal way to cement Christian influence in South Arabia.

### **5.3 Places of worship**

The Christians of Najrān recognised different types of place of worship, depending on the structure of the building, its location, the practices of worship performed inside and the people who lived there. A classification of these places was performed by Shahīd (1979) and Abū al-Jadāyil (2004), who divided the places of worship in Najrān into three types: church, monastery and *Martyrium* (a place where martyrs are buried). Both scholars adopted this classification after considering the Ka‘ba of Najrān as a Christian place of worship and pilgrimage, which is suggested by several Muslim sources, as will be discussed below. Shahīd (1979) and Abū al-Jadāyil (2004) assume that the Ka‘ba of Najrān became a holy place named the *Martyrium*, whereas Trimmingham (1979) proposes that the Ka‘ba of Najrān can be the Muslim sources’ term for the Church of the Monastery of Najrān. It is arguable that the Ka‘ba of Najrān was not a Christian place of worship; instead, it seems to have been a social space for meetings. Moreover, the Christians of Najrān regularly used three types of building: churches, monasteries and hermitages. These will be discussed later in this chapter.

### 5.3.1 The Ka'ba of Najrān

A number of Muslim scholars, such as al-Qazwīnī (1960), al-Bakrī (1983), al-Ḥamawī (1995) and al-Iṣfahānī (1997), described the Ka'ba of Najrān as a Christian place for holding prayers and religious celebrations, and as a place of pilgrimage by other Arab groups during the pre-Islamic period. They agree that this Ka'ba was constructed by Banū ad-Dayyān, the tribal chieftain of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka'b in Najrān. According to these Muslim scholars, there were Christian clergy who were consecrated to serve this Ka'ba. However, there is disagreement and a confused understanding in these sources as to whether this Ka'ba was a church, an abbey or a monastery. Shahīd (1979) suggests that this may be due to a lack of familiarity among Muslim historians with Christian places of worship. This suggestion is likely to be true, as can be seen from the use of both terms, *Bāy'āt* (abbey) and *Dayr* (monastery), when discussing the Ka'ba of Najrān in these sources. More specifically, al-Bakrī (1983) and al-Iṣfahānī (1991) in *The Book of al-Diyārāt* (monasteries), speak of *Dayr Najrān* (the monastery of Najrān), whereas al-Iṣfahānī (1997) himself, in another work, *The Book of al-Aghānī* and al-Ḥamawī (1995) call this place *Bāy'āt Najrān* (the abbey of Najrān).

However, this confusion does not merely relate to the name of the building, but also concerns the purpose and architecture of the Ka'ba of Najrān. The above sources agree that the Banū ad-Dayyān built the Ka'ba to care for indigents, welcome notable guests and poets, and offer hospitality for everyone who came to the Ka'ba. Part of their description on the Ka'ba of Najrān probably speaks of another holy religious function, as a place visited by other worshippers, and regularly by Christians. In another piece of evidence, al-Iṣfahānī (1997) stated that this Ka'ba was a great dome (*Qūbba*) made from leather, whereas al-Bakrī (1983) and al-Ḥamawī (1995) described the Ka'ba of Najrān as a square house made from golden mosaic cubes.

There are four important issues that are not taken into consideration by Shahīd (1979), Trimmingham (1979) and Abū al-Jadāyil (2004), which can clarify the purpose and function of the Ka'ba of Najrān. Firstly, the origins of al-Qazwīnī, al-Bakrī, al-Ḥamawī and al-Iṣfahānī's statements concerning the Ka'ba of Najrān were very possibly derived from an important and older statement reported by Ibn al-Kalbī (1924) in *Kitāb Al-Aṣnām*. Ibn al-Kalbī is inclined to believe that the Ka'ba of Najrān was not for worship, but may have been a meeting place for the chieftains and nobles of Najrān, in contrast to the view of the previously-mentioned Muslim scholars. He observes that the people of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka'b did not use its name in their nomenclatures (they did

not name their sons *Abdull-Ka'ba* as might be expected) and poets of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka'b generally did not mention this Ka'ba in their poetic productions.

The second issue relates to the literary accounts which furnish useful information on the visits of pre-Islamic poets to the Banū ad-Dayyān in Najrān. One of these can be found in a poem recited by the pre-Islamic poet al-A'shā,<sup>58</sup> on the occasion of his visit to Najrān. In his poem, al-A'shā describes his visit to a place called the Ka'ba of Najrān, which featured women dancers, musical instruments and cups of wine rather than religious practices. What is more, al-A'shā met several polytheistic and Christian Najrānite nobles inside this Ka'ba. There are also two relevant statements reporting on visits made by another two pre-Islamic poets, Umaiyya ibn Abī aṣ-Ṣalt<sup>59</sup> and Duraīd bin al-Ṣūma<sup>60</sup>, to the Banū ad-Dayyān in Najrān. Both poets spoke only of social events held by chieftains of the Banū ad-Dayyān, especially of the traditional guests of Arab chieftains at that time (al-Qālī, 1978, al-Iṣfahānī, 1997). As in al-A'shā's statement, these two poets did not describe any religious practices being held at this place, and never mentioned the term "Ka'ba" as a place of worship by the Banū ad-Dayyān.

The third issue concerns the original faith of the Banū ad-Dayyān, the custodians of the Ka'ba of Najrān, as claimed by the above Muslim sources. When reviewing the members of the delegation of Najrānite Christians who met the Prophet Muḥammad in Medina, no Banū ad-Dayyān men are to be found among the Christian delegation (al-Ya'qūbī, 1883, Ibn-Hishām, 1955, al-Ṭabarī, 1995). Meanwhile, when looking at members of the polytheistic Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka'b tribe, it should be noted that the leader and spokesman of this delegation was Yazīd bin 'Abd al-Madān bin ad-Dayyān, who appears to have been the greatest chieftain of his tribe during the life of the Prophet Muḥammad (Ibn-Sa'ad, n.d., al-Ya'qūbī, 1883). Several other men of the Banū ad-Dayyān also came with this polytheistic delegation (Ibn-Hishām, 1955, al-Mas'ūdī, 1981, Ibn-Khayyāṭ, 1993,

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55 al-A'shā was one of the most prominent poets during pre-Islamic era and his original name is Maymūn bin Qays. He lived between 570-625 CE, and was contemporary to the advent of Islam but did not convert to Islam. He died in his hometown, Manfūḥa (now inside Riyadh) in 7 AH/ 625 CE (Meisami and Starkey 1998, Jockers 2016al-Iṣfahānī, 1997).

59 Umaiyya ibn Abī aṣ-Ṣalt al-Thaqfī was a pre-Islamic poet and one of the few Arabs who refused to worship idols, and converted to *Ḥanīfiyyah*. He lived until the time of the Prophet Muḥammad but rejected Islam and died in 626 CE / 5AH (al-Jumāḥī, 1974, al-Iṣfahānī, 1997).

60 Duraīd bin al-Ṣūma was a pre-Islamic poet and well-known knight of the Hawāzin tribe. He lived a long time prior to the rise of Islam and was killed when he fought Muslim armies in the Battle of Ḥunayn in 630 CE / 08 AH (Ibn-Qutaybah, 1969, al-Jumāḥī, 1974).

Ibn al-Athīr, 1997). Thus, it is to be wondered why a non-Christian family would build a large church, especially considering that the majority of the Banū ad-Dayyān were polytheists or non-Christians at least. Therefore, it is difficult to accept the assumption of the establishment of a great church by the non-Christian, Banū ad-Dayyān as has been claimed above.

The fourth issue is regarding the visit of Philby (1952) and al-Bilādī (1982) to the supposed site of this Ka‘ba, located around 40 km east of Najrān, in the hills of Taṣlāl. Philby (1952) claims that landmarks, particularly a cluster of palletised stones and an old cemetery, offer evidence that the Ka‘ba of Najrān existed at that site. By contrast, al-Bilādī (1982) believes that these landmarks do not provide enough evidence for the existence of a religious house in the hills of Taṣlāl. The argument of al-Bilādī appears to be more convincing, because Philby did not reference his sources in his claim, and he may have simply relied on oral versions reported by the local people of Najrān who accompanied him on his journey.

The current author visited the supposed site of the Ka‘ba of Najrān in the hills of Taṣlāl (now to the east of Najrān Regional Airport). It is a desert area, with a Bedouin population rather than rural settlements, even in the present day, and there are still only a few Bedouin residents who live in these hills with their camels and cattle. There are no readily apparent archeological remains that could support the claim that this site is the location of the Ka‘ba of Najrān. The Taṣlāl site simply consists of groups of rocks and stones, sometimes set in a circle, but these landmarks seem to be natural rather than archeological remains (see the Appendix 4: Photos 5 and 6).

From the above discussion, there appears to be some misunderstanding and confusion between Muslim scholars who spoke of the Ka‘ba of Najrān as a holy church of the Najrānite Christians. This claim was adopted by Shahīd, Trimmingham (1979) and Abū al-Jadāyil (2004) as being a Muslim term for the holy church of Najrān (*Martyrium*). The central misunderstanding here is the identification of the holy church as the Ka‘ba of Najrān owned by the Banū ad-Dayyān. As has been shown, earlier descriptions by pre-Islamic poets and the author ibn al-Kalbī confirm that this Ka‘ba would have been a social place for meetings and celebrations, rather than a Christian place of worship. Furthermore, the actual use of the specific term “Ka‘ba” for the social meeting place of the Banū ad-Dayyān is extremely unlikely, because it is not mentioned in any pre-Islamic literature, and is conspicuously absent from literary accounts produced by pre-Islamic poets, except for al-A‘shā, who may have used it as a description of its shape rather than its real name.



As a result, there is a fundamental difference between the holy church of Najrān and the Ka‘ba of Najrān, unlike the claims made by Shahīd, Trimmingham (1979) and Abū al-Jadāyil (2004). The Ka‘ba seems to have been simply a place for social events, rather than a Christian place of worship.

### 5.3.2 Churches (Abbeys)

The evidence for the existence of a central church is stronger in Christian sources than in Muslim ones. *The Book of the Ḥimyarites* (Moberg, 1924) gives a general reference to the rebuilding of destroyed churches in Najrān by the Abyssinian king, Kālēb, whereas *The Martyrdom of Aretha* (Ibrāhīm, 2007) speaks in more detail of restoring these destroyed churches in Najrān, and also building a new church where martyrs were murdered. More clearly still, *The Acts of Gregentios* (Berger, 2006) supplies direct details for three main churches built by Kālēb. The first was called the Church of the Resurrection, was most likely constructed on the same site as the destroyed church; the second was the Church of the Holy Mother of God, which, according to *The Acts of Gregentios* (Berger, 2006), was not far from the town centre; the third was the Church of the Holy Martyrs and the Glorious Aretha, which was built at the location of the house of the martyr Aretha (Berger, 2006).

Although *The Book of the Ḥimyarites* only provides a general statement regarding the restoration of destroyed churches, it does agree with the *Martyrdom of Aretha* in narrating the same account of the actions of the Abyssinian king after his arrival in Najrān, namely rebuilding its churches, in particular the central church in the town centre and also building another church on the site where many of the Najrānite martyrs had been burnt to death by the Ḥimyarite king Dhū Nuwās. Likewise, although most of the details offered by *The Acts of Gregentios* do not exist in *The Book of the Ḥimyarites* and *The Martyrdom of Aretha*, there is a significant agreement among all three Christian sources regarding the Abyssinian king’s efforts to restore Najrān’s central church and build other churches to support the growing influence of Christianity there. As evidence of this, *The Martyrdom of Aretha* and *The Acts of Gregentios* agree that the house of Saint Aretha was made into a Holy Church.

Thus, the account in *The Acts of Gregentios* concerning the details of Najrān’s churches can be considered additional knowledge, rather than being contradictory. Regardless of the true names of these churches, eastern Christians used special names for their holy churches that reflected their religious memory during the period under study. This offers strong evidence for the existence of a

holy church in the town centre, which perhaps refers to the Church of the Holy Martyrs, in addition to lower-ranking churches in outlying rural areas.

Additionally, the suggestion that this church became a shrine for martyrs is most likely true, because this church was not only used for prayer and normal Christian practices of worship, but it also became a destination for Christian pilgrims, as will be discussed in the sub-section 5.6.3. Importantly, it was common for eastern Christian churches to include cemeteries for saints and martyrs, as could be seen in Egypt, Syria and Mesopotamia during the pre- and early Islamic eras, and these churches became places of pilgrimage for Christian groups (al-Iṣḥāhānī, 1991). As a result, the use of term *Martyrium* for this particular type of church appears here in the significant name of the Church of the Holy Martyrs.

In Muslim sources, although there is apparent confusion in identifying Christian places of worship, as discussed above, they offer strong evidence for the existence of churches in Najrān, particularly a holy church. Although the word *Kanīsā* (singular of *Kānī's*) is the most regular term for church in Arabic, the terms *Bay'āh* seems to be the most common throughout those Muslim sources that speak of Najrān's churches, especially the central church. This can be seen in the covenant agreed by the Prophet Muḥammad with the bishop Abū al-Ḥārith bin 'Alqama, which speaks of protecting *Bi'ahim* (their abbeys) (Ibn-Sa'ad, n.d.), whereas Ibn-Hishām (1955) used the term *Kānī's* when talking about church-building by Byzantium in Najrān during the pre-Islamic period. It should also be noted that a significant statement was provided by Ibn-Ṭāwūs (1996), who reported on an urgent meeting, called after receiving a letter from the Prophet Muḥammad, and held at *Bay'athm al-Uḍmā* (The Great Abbey) of Najrān.

The present author visited the archaeological site in the town of al-Ukhdūd. Although the archaeological remains of this building are not sufficient to identify whether it is church or a mosque, the overall design of this building suggests a religious place of worship. The description of the above Christian sources of the central church in the town centre is also consistent with the current location of these archaeological remains.

Overall, the presence of a holy church and other churches, as formal places of worship, seems certain, particularly in the town centre and rural areas where most Christians could be found.

### 5.3.3 Monasteries and Hermitages

In addition to churches, the Christians of Najrān had two other types of places of worship: monasteries and hermitages. Muslim sources provide confused images for both types, in the same way as for churches. Muslim dictionaries, such as those of al-Zabīdī (1965), al-Fayyūmī (1977), Ibn-Manẓūr (1994) and al-Jawharī (1999) offer definitions of the two types of building, showing significant similarities and differences between them regarding eastern Christian communities, including Najrānite Christians. A hermitage (*Ṣawmā'a*) typically means the small house in which a Christian hermit lives alone to worship, and takes its name in Arabic, *Ṣawmā'a*, from the dome of the hermitage, which is usually tapered and sharp (al-Zabīdī, 1965, al-Fayyūmī, 1977, al-Jawharī, 1999). Meanwhile, the monastery (*al-Dayr*), means a house for monks, in which monks live and worship at the same time (al-Maqrīzī, 1970, Ibn-Manẓūr, 1994, al-Ḥamawī, 1995).

The existence of monasteries and hermitages in Najrān is almost certain, although the available information is sparse. One indication can be found in the covenant of the Prophet Muḥammad with the Najrānite bishops, which states that their monasteries must be protected. An additional statement, offered by al-Bakrī (1983), speaks of the kind of location in which Najrānite Christians built their monasteries. It tells how Najrānites preferred to build their monasteries in places where brooks and grasslands exist.

For hermitages in particular, one valuable statement, given by al-Bayhaqī (1988), records that the bishop of Najrān, Abū al-Ḥārith bin 'Alqama, ordered the ringing of bells in the hermitages and monasteries that were located across the valley of Najrān, including the countryside, when he wanted to gather his followers and tell them of the emergence of the Prophet Muḥammad. In another location, al-Bayhaqī (1988) refers to a monk, Layth bin Abī Shammar al-Zabīdī, who was living alone in his small hermitage.

From the above discussion, there are three important ideas that can be understood. First, regarding hermitages and monasteries alike, it is noticeable that the Christians of Najrān did not differ from other eastern Christian societies, who regularly built their hermitages and monasteries outside city centre and rural areas, unlike churches, which were located in towns, villages and population centres. Thus, the location of monasteries and hermitages were commonly in areas frequented by nomads, specifically near grasslands and water sources as mentioned above. Secondly, al-Bayhaqī's statement offers strong evidence to suggest that the number of hermitages and monasteries in the Najrān region grew during the late pre-Islamic and early Islamic periods. This growth involved a

flourishing of monastic life due to the increased number of hermits and worshippers living in these hermitages, as will be discussed in sub-section 5.6.4.

The third point that can be concluded is the significant similarities and differences between both monastery and hermitage. With regard to similarities, the Muslim accounts show that both types of Christian places of worship normally existed outside the city centre, and Christians living in these places had to be worshippers. Also, both hermitage and monastery were designed for the practice of monastic life. With regard to differences, according to Muslim accounts, a monastery was larger than a hermitage, as a monastery contained a group of worshippers living as a community, while a hermitage appeared to be a single small room for only one worshipper who chose to live alone, as can be seen in the case of the Najrānite monk Layth bin Abī Shammar.

#### **5.4 Doctrines of Najrānite Christians**

The doctrines of Najrānite Christians have been given attention by several researchers, who disagree over the official doctrine adopted by the Christians of Najrān. Block (2012) assumes that the Najrānite Christians who sent a delegation to the Prophet Muḥammad were Monophysites. It is clear that Block mainly relies on Ibn-Hishām's statement about this delegation in order to inform his assumptions about the Christians of Najrān as Monophysites. On the other hand, authors such as Watt (1956), Dā'ūd (1988), Cheikho (1989), Dughaym (1995) and Goddard (2000) suppose that most of the Christians of Najrān had become Nestorians by the beginning of the seventh century CE, as a consequence of Persian support for Eastern Nestorian Christianity against its opponent, the Christian Orthodoxy of Byzantium.

In fact, it could be said there is an incomplete understanding, due to the fact that the doctrinal history of Najrānite Christianity has gone through several stages of development during the period under study. This development contributed to forming a doctrinal diversity within the Najrānite Christian community. This diversity became apparent at the advent of Islam, when the Christians of Najrān included Monophysites (Jacobites<sup>61</sup> and Julianites<sup>62</sup>), Nestorians and Melchites<sup>63</sup>, not simply

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61 Jacobism was a renewal movement within Monophysitism, and was established by the bishop of Edessa, Jacob Baradaeus, who died in 578 CE (Rist, 2006, Wolfgang, 2011).

62 Julianism was considered to be a heretical Monophysitic sect by other Monophysites and Nestorians. It emerged in the 6th century CE (al-Āyib, 1998, Panicker, 2002).

63 Melchitism refers to the group of Christians who accepted the Council of Chalcedon's (451CE) formula regarding the nature of Christ. Therefore, its followers were also known as Chalcedonians, as well as Miaphysites because they

one doctrine as previously supposed. The history of the three Christian sects can be understood in the light of three main periods, which witnessed important events that contributed to the formation of the doctrinal structure of Najrānite Christianity: the Abyssinian, Persian and early Islamic periods.

By the period of the Abyssinian occupation, Monophysitism was probably the dominant doctrine among the Christians of Najrān. This doctrine refers to only one nature of Jesus Christ, uniting the divine and human natures, unlike the two divine and human natures of Jesus Christ which was officially adopted at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 CE (Rist, 2006). Historically, eastern churches in Egypt, Abyssinia and Syria adopted Monophysitism as their official doctrine after the Council of Chalcedon and prior to the advent of Islam (al-‘Āyib, 1998). All these eastern churches became known as Jacobites due to Jacob Baradaeus, the founder of the Monophysitic movement during the sixth century CE (al-‘Āyib, 1998).

The influence of Monophysitism on the Christians of Najrān apparently dates back to the early sixth century CE. This influence began with some Monophysitic clerics in Syria, particularly Philoxenus of Mabbug<sup>64</sup>, Jacob of Serugh and Simon of Bêth Arshām. Philoxenus of Mabbug consecrated two bishops, Paul I and Paul II, as Monophysitic bishops of Najrān, whereas Jacob of Serugh and Simon of Bêth Arshām wrote important letters to describe the persecution of Najrānite Christians (Ya‘qūb, 1966, Shahīd, 1971). Although Muslim sources are silent in neither confirming nor refuting the relationship between the Christians of Najrān and the Monophysitic church in the early part of the sixth century CE, the Monophysitic influence became certain with the intervention of the Abyssinians in South Arabia.

The available Christian sources that talk of the Abyssinian period (525-575 CE) provide strong evidence of how Monophysitism was propagated among the Christians of Najrān. *The Book of the Himyarites* (Moberg, 1924), Michael the Syrian (1996) and *The Martyrdom of Aretha* (Ibrāhīm, 2007) speak of Abyssinian efforts to increase the Monophysitic influence among Najrān Christians, particularly by consecrating Monophysitic bishops and bringing in new clergy, as well as making the church of Najrān officially belong to the Monophysitic Church. These three sources report that

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believed that Jesus Christ has both a human and divine nature, united in one nature (Griffith, 2006, Di Berardino et al., 2013).

64 Philoxenus of Mabbug was a Syriac scholar and clergyman who became the Monophysitic bishop of Mabbug and died around 523 CE (Afrām, 1976).

Timotheus, the Patriarch of Alexandria, dispatched an archbishop to be the head of all of the churches of Ḥimyarite regions, including Najrān, which later became the centre of Christianity in South Arabia.

Additionally, *The Chronicle of Seert* (Scher, 1907) and Michael the Syrian (1996) provide important details about Julianism reaching Najrān. *The Chronicle of Seert* speaks of the emigration of Julianites from al-Ḥīra to Najrān at the time of the Patriarch Silas, probably after 525 CE, because they were persecuted by the Nestorians, while Michael the Syrian (1996) gives details of the consecration of a bishop called Sargis for the Julianite sect in Najrān in 550 CE.

The above accounts give enough evidence to assume that Monophysitism was the doctrine of most Christians in Najrān and South Arabia during the period of the Abyssinian occupation. However, they also provide evidence for the serious split within Monophysitism that occurred during this time as well. This split can be seen in the emigration of the Julianites to Najrān and the establishment of their own sect in addition to the regular Monophysitic sect of the Jacobites. The Julianite sect adopted different theological concepts concerning Christ's body after death, believing it to be incorruptible prior to the Day of Judgment. Therefore, the followers of Julianism were considered to be heretics by other Monophysites and Nestorians alike.

The second period of Najrānite Christianity was the period of the Persian occupation (after 597 CE) prior to the arrival of Islam in Najrān around 9 AH / 630 CE. This period supposedly witnessed the domination of Nestorianism over the Christians of Najrān, as Watt (1956), Dā'ūd (1988), Cheikho (1989), Dughaym (1995) and Goddard (2000) have claimed. This supposition is clearly based on the role played by the Persian occupation of South Arabia, rather than from direct details relating to Nestorian activities to propagate Nestorianism among Najrānite Christians during the Persian period. In reality, the region of Najrān enjoyed relative autonomy during this period, as discussed before (see sub-section 2.5.3). Therefore, the Persian role in supporting Nestorianism in Najrān seems to be rather unlikely.

The status of Nestorianism in Najrān can be examined in the third period of Christianity in Najrān, which began with the arrival of Islam in Najrān in 10 AH / 631 CE. This period provides greater evidence, in the light of further information offered by both Muslim and Christian sources. Christian sources offer two valuable statements, one given by Hebraeus (2012), which states that the Nestorian bishop, Joshua, came with the delegation of Najrānite Christians to Medina. The second statement is reported by Nestorian chronicles (Duval et al., 1908, Cheikho, 1989), which tell

how the Nestorian church still consecrated bishops in South Arabia until the eighth century CE, when Saint Peter was bishop of Najrān and San‘ā. Both statements show the extent to which Nestorianism was a minority doctrine, in addition to other Christian sects, rather than the supposition that Nestorianism was the dominant doctrine among Najrān Christians. Furthermore, the political status of Najrān was that of apparent autonomy, rather than being subject to Persian rule. This means the Persian role in supporting Nestorian missionaries was almost not existent, unlike what was previously supposed.

With regard to Muslim sources, the first letter sent by the Prophet Muḥammad to the Christians of Najrān contains a number of references to the doctrines of Najrānite Christians at the advent of Islam. It is remarkable that the Prophet used the plural “bishops” instead of the singular when saying “From Muḥammad the Prophet and Messenger of Allāh to the bishops of Najrān” (al-Ya‘qūbī, 1883: vol. 2, 81). This particular reference implies that there was more than one bishop followed by Christians in Najrān, and thus, the pluralism of bishops provides evidence of the existence of more than one doctrine among the Christians of Najrān, although this letter does not identify which doctrines were adopted by those Christians.

Two early accounts offered by Ibn-Hishām (1955) and Muqātil (1979) supply direct details for the doctrines of the delegation of Najrānite Christians to Medina. In the first, Ibn-Hishām (1955) states that “they were Christians according to the Byzantine rite, though they differed among themselves in some points, saying He is God, and He is the son of God, and He is the third person of the Trinity, which is the doctrine of Christianity” (p 271). Ibn-Hishām explains why these Najrānite Christians differed in defining the nature of Jesus Christ, saying “they argue Jesus as God because of his miracles, while the second group consider him as the son of God because Jesus had no father, and he could speak in the cradle, while the third group argues that he (Jesus) is the third of three in that God says: we have done, we have commanded, we created and we decreed” (p 272).

The second account is that of Muqātil (1979), which refers to the delegation of Najrānite Christians as *Mār Ya‘qūbiyyīn* (Jacobites), particularly in reference to the two leaders, al-Sayyid and al-‘Āqib, who argued with the Prophet Muḥammad concerning whether Jesus Christ is God or not, and whether he has one divine nature.

It is clear that Ibn-Hishām (1955) and Muqātil (1979) disagreed on whether Najrānite Christians were Melchites or Jacobites. Ibn-Hishām remarkably offers a confused identification of the doctrines of Najrānite Christians. He states that those Christians adopted the Melchite Orthodox rite

as the official doctrine of their church, but he also concedes that they still differ in their theological understanding of Jesus Christ. In contrast, Muqātil identifies the Christians of Najrān as Jacobites, and specifies two leaders, al-Sayyid and al-‘Āqib, who led the argument with the Prophet Muḥammad. Importantly, he does not speak of the bishop of Najrān, Abū al-Hārith bin ‘Alqama, who was a Melchite, as mentioned above.

The disagreement between Ibn-Hishām (1955) and Muqātil (1979) suggest a doctrinal split among the Christian community in Najrān. Ibn-Hishām’s explanation of the doctrine of the Trinity followed by Najrānite Christians is helpful because it contains an important reference to the adoption of the divine nature of Jesus Christ as God. This reference is somewhat consistent with Muqātil’s statement concerning al-Sayyid and al-‘Āqib, who argued that Jesus Christ is God. Both seemingly reflect the official doctrinal adoption of Monophysitism towards Christ during the time under study, rather than the Melchite doctrine as Ibn-Hishām considered above. The doctrines of the three leaders of the delegation of Najrānite Christians appears to be more obviously both Melchite and Monophysitic, and thus this is perhaps what Ibn-Hishām meant when he said that “they differed among themselves”.

In addition to Ibn-Hishām (1955) and Muqātil (1979), later Muslim commentators such as al-Zamakhsharī (1947), al-Wāḥidī (1994), al-Tha‘ālibī (1998) and al-Bayḍāwī (1999) cast more light on the identity of the doctrines of Najrānite Christians. al-Tha‘ālibī (1998), in his discussion of Ibn-Hishām’s statement, considers that the delegation of Najrānite Christians consisted of Nestorians, Jacobites and Melchites. This assumption may be thought of as an attempt to find a logical answer to the confusion of Ibn-Hishām’s statement, rather than as primary evidence. In other words, it is clear that al-Tha‘ālibī tries to be more familiar with his understanding of Jesus Christ in the three specific doctrines, particularly concerning whether he has one divine nature or both human and divine natures. However, he simply references the statements by Ibn-Hishām and Muqātil, rather than providing new information.

However, al-Zamakhsharī (1947), al-Wāḥidī (1994) and al-Bayḍāwī (1999) provide direct evidence supporting al-Tha‘ālibī’s assumption. They tell how the two leaders of Najrānite Christians, al-Sayyid and al-‘Āqib, disagreed over the story of *Aṣḥāb al-Kahf* (the Seven Sleepers) in the presence of the Prophet Muḥammad. They record that al-Sayyid was a Jacobite whereas al-‘Āqib was a Nestorian, which caused an argument over the exact number of the people in *Aṣḥāb al-Kahf*. The statements of al-Zamakhsharī, al-Wāḥidī and al-Bayḍāwī seem not to be about the encounter



between the Prophet Muḥammad and Najrānite Christians that Ibn-Hishām and Muqātil reported, but concern a different occasion. The importance of that occasion can be seen in identifying the doctrines of these two leaders of Najrānite Christians, al-Sayyid and al-‘Āqib. This is evidently consistent with the above assumption of the adoption of more than one doctrine among the Christians of Najrān, especially Jacobism and Nestorianism.

The above Muslim and Christian sources say almost nothing regarding the approximate date of the arrival of Melchitism in Najrān, unlike what they say about Monophysitism and Nestorianism. It is only Ibn-Hishām (1955) who reported on this, and later al-Tha‘ālibī, from the perspective of discussing the encounter between the Prophet Muḥammad and the delegation of Najrānite Christians. But Melchitism probably arrived in Najrān during the late pre-Islamic period, due to the Byzantine desire to halt the Persian influence in South Arabia. The evidence here can be seen in the close relationships between some bishops of Najrān and the Byzantine rulers, especially Quss bin Sā‘ida al-Iyādī and Abū al-Ḥārith bin ‘Alqama (Ibn-Hishām, 1955). The bishop Abū al-Ḥārith spent time in Byzantium studying in its religious schools, as Ibn-Hishām related. This direct relationship possibly involved the adoption of the official doctrine of the Byzantine church, Melchitism, in Najrān. This transition to Melchitism appears to be certain among the Christians of Najrān during the early Islamic period, as reported by Ibn-Hishām.

From this, it is clear that Christianity in Najrān went through three major phases during the period under study. It appears to have been Monophysitic during the Abyssinian occupation of South Arabia, but then Monophysitism split, resulting in the establishment of another Monophysitic sect, Julianism. In the period of the Persian occupation of South Arabia, prior to the advent of Islam, Nestorianism seems to have formed a minor presence, rather than dominating the Christians of Najrān. In addition, Melchitism may have emerged as a consequence of Persian-Byzantine competition, probably in the late pre-Islamic period. In summary, by the advent of Islam, the Christians of Najrān seem to have been divided into three main sects: Monophysites (Jacobites and Julianites), Nestorians and Melchites.

## **5.5 Theological concepts**

The doctrinal diversity among the Christians of Najrān obviously means there were differences in their theological concepts too. These theological concepts are significant for understanding whether

they agreed or disagreed over the Christology of Jesus, Mary, Prophethood, Paradise and Hell fire (*Jahannam*), and the concept of creation.

The adoption of the Trinity among Najrānite Christians is likely to have begun to dominate with the Abyssinian entry into Najrān. The evidence of this assumption is based on two main factors, the re-establishment the church in Najrān by Abyssinian Monophysites and consecration of new Monophysitic clergy for this church under the auspices of the Monophysitic Church (Moberg, 1924, Ibrāhīm, 2007). Further evidence, reported by *The Acts of Gregentios* (Berger, 2006), involves the building of a specific church of the Trinity. That most probably involved the propagation of Monophysitism among Najrānite Christians and the adoption of its official concept of Christ. In other words, the divine nature of Jesus Christ, which was widely adopted by Monophysitism, was most likely also accepted by the Christians of Najrān during this period.

Later, most evidently with the rise of Islam, the existence of more than one doctrine resulted in different theologies among different doctrines. In other words, the doctrinal division amongst the Christians of Najrān into Monophysites, Nestorians and Melchites reasonably led to differences in their understanding of the Christology of Jesus Christ as detailed in the previous section. Some these differences can be explored through several interfaith dialogues between Muslims and Christians of Najrān, which highlight some of the theological concepts of Christians in Najrān. Probably the greatest dialogue took place during the meeting between the Prophet Muḥammad and the delegation of Najrānite Christians in Medina. It was evidently the most important dialogue, because it contained a theological controversy concerning the major areas of agreement and disagreement between the Christians of Najrān and Islam.

This particular dialogue is given detailed attention by Muslim commentators on the Qur'an such as al-Zamakhsharī (1947), al-Qurṭubī (1964), al-Baghawī (1986), al-Ṭabarī (1995), Ibn-Kathīr (2000) and Ibn al-Mundhir al-Naysābūrī (2002), with the purpose of debating the incident of *Mubāhala* and the reason for the revelation of the first eighty verses of *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān*. It is also an interesting event for early Muslim historians such as Ibn-Sa'ad (n.d.), al-Ya'qūbī (1883), al-Balādhurī (1987) and al-Bayhaqī (1988). *Mubāhala* is also the subject of significant interest from *Shī'ah*<sup>65</sup> scholars in

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65 A political and religious movement in Islam, its followers believe that the political and religious leadership of Muslims should have passed to the Prophet's cousin, 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib and his family (Madelung, 2012).

the light of discussions concerning the honoured status of the Prophet's family (*Ahl al-Bayt*) (Ibn-Shahrāshūb, 1991, al-Qummī, 1992, Ibn-Ṭāwūs, 1996, al-Majlisī, 2008).

However, most of the details of the dialogue have been repeated by the above Muslim sources without significant difference in the major topics, only in their presentation. In other words, the dialogue specifically focuses on the Christology of Jesus. This may be because they derived most of the details of the dialogue from two early accounts, the first one was narrated by Ibn-Hishām (1955) who relates that “the Apostle (the Prophet Muḥammad) said to them, ‘Submit yourselves’. They said, ‘we have submitted’. He said: ‘You have not submitted, so submit.’ They said, nay, but we submitted before you’. He said, you lie. Your assertion that God has a son, your worship of the cross, and your eating of pork hold you back from submission’. They said, ‘But who is his father, Muḥammad? The apostle was silent and did not answer them. So, God sent down concerning their words and their incoherence the beginning of the Sura of the Family of Imran up to more than eighty verses” (p272).

The second version, reported in *The Commentary of Muqātil* (1979), provides a significant account of this dialogue which differs in part from Ibn-Hishām's account. It relates that the Christians of Najrān spoke to the Prophet Muḥammad: “O Muḥammad, why do you abuse and dishonour our master? The Prophet of Islam answers, “What master of yours?”, and the Christians say, “Jesus is son of Mary the virgin. The Christians pursue their request: “Show us a servant like him in what Allah has created. He gives life to the dead and heals the blind and the leper and creates a bird from clay... While every human has a father, Jesus had no father. So agree with us that Jesus is the son of Allah and we will follow you. The Prophet said: Allah forbids that he should have a son or that there be a god with him. The two (meaning al-Sayyid and al-‘Āqib) said: Are you more praised (*Aḥmad*)? The prophet replies, “I am more praised, and I am praised (*Muḥammad*). The two then ask, “In what [are you] more praised? The prophet replies, more praised by the people concerning *shirk*. The two then say, We will ask you about (some) things. The Prophet responds, I will not tell you until you submit, then follow me. The two said: “We submitted prior to you,” but the Prophet denies their claim. You two are not submitting, he says: Three things hold you back from Islam: your eating of pork, your drinking of wine, and your saying that Allah, powerful and exalted, has a son” (Transl. Nickel, 2011, pp1, 173-178).

The two main sources agree that the dialogue ended by what was suggested by the Prophet, that they should receive *Mubāhala*<sup>66</sup> the next day (Ibn-Hishām, 1955). All Muslim sources agree that the Najrān Christians were reconciled with the Prophet Muḥammad after this.

In both the Ibn-Hishām and Muqātil versions, the main focus of the dialogue is on the Christology of Jesus, in addition to minor issues such as Prophethood, crucifixion and eating pork. In other words, the dialogue evidently reflects the theological understanding of the Christians of Najrān towards Jesus Christ, concerning whether he is divine or human, and thus whether those Najrānite Christians consider Mary to be the Mother of the Son of God or not. According to Ibn-Hishām, the dialogue debated whether Jesus Christ is the Son of God or not, rather than his nature. Meanwhile, Muqātil reports further details when he states that al-Sayyid and al-‘Āqib expressed a strong belief in the divinity of Jesus Christ as the Son of God and the second person in the Trinity, who had no father and is completely divine, and they therefore consider Mary to be the Mother of the Son of God.

However, the views of al-Sayyid and al-‘Āqib cannot be taken to reflect the views of all Christians of Najrān relating to Jesus Christ. It is important to remember that the Christians of Najrān followed several doctrines of faith at the advent of Islam, as discussed in the previous section. These involve major differences in their Christology of Jesus Christ, although Muslim sources do not offer direct details of these differences. Thus, it may be assumed that the concepts of Jesus Christ, Mary, the Holy Spirit and the death of Jesus, as well as other related issues, were not the same in all three main sects. More specifically, according to Christian sources, Monophysitism is described as non-Chalcedonian because its followers rejected the Council of Chalcedon’s formula for the Christology of Jesus Christ and adopted the belief in the single, fully divine nature of Jesus Christ, unlike Melchitism, which accepted the formula of the Council of Chalcedon. Nestorianism, however, considered there to be two separate divine and human natures of Jesus Christ, united in one person. As a result, each sect had a different concept to argue with the Prophet Muḥammad, although Muslim sources paid greatest attention to the two Jacobite leaders, al-Sayyid and al-‘Āqib.

The meeting between the Prophet Muḥammad and the delegation of Najrānite Christians potentially included debates concerning other issues, which were given insufficient attention in reports of the discussion, such as Prophethood and holy books. This can be inferred from the discussion of several

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<sup>66</sup> The term *Mubāhala* in Islam possibly means the invocation of God’s curse on a person who is a liar (Schmucker, 2012).

theological figures in the first eighty verses of Sūrat al-‘Imran, which were revealed because of this dialogue between the Prophet Muḥammad and the Najrānite Christians. This assumption is also supported by a valuable statement by al-Ya‘qūbī, who indicates that the Najrānite delegation remained a long time, debating whatever they wanted with the Prophet. This short statement gives indirect evidence that the dialogue included other issues.

One of these issues is the concept of Prophethood. The debate concerning this issue among the Christians of Najrān can be traced back to the beginnings of Christianity in Najrān. According to *The Martyrdom of Aretha* (Ibrāhīm, 2007), the belief in the true Prophethood of previous prophets, such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Samuel and David, was a major issue that was argued by the Christians of Najrān against the Ḥimyarite king, Dhū Nuwās. This issue is a fundamental belief in the theology of Christianity, but the concept of Prophethood itself in Najrānite Christians thought is an interesting topic. In this respect, a statement made by al-Sijistānī (1961), relates that the bishop of Najrān, Quss bin Sā‘ida al-Iyādī, used to speak of a true prophet who will appear soon.

Ibn-Hishām (1955) offers an important statement with regard to a conversation between the bishop of Najrān, Abū al-Ḥārith bin ‘Alqama, and his brother, Kūz bin ‘Alqama, when they were going to Medina with the delegation of Najrānite Christians. On their journey, Kūz cursed the Prophet Muḥammad, but his brother forbade him from doing so, because Muḥammad was a true prophet. According to Ibn-Hishām (1955), Kūz asked his brother: “then if you know that, what stops you from accepting him (the Prophet Muḥammad)?” Abū al-Ḥārith replied: “The way these people (the Byzantines) have treated us. They have given us titles, paid us subsidies and honoured us” (p 271). This statement suggests an economic reason for the bishop’s rejection of the Prophethood of Muḥammad, despite his belief that Muḥammad may have been a true prophet.

Similarly, a fragment reported by al-Bayhaqī (1988) tells how on one occasion, the bishop of Najrān, Abū al-Ḥārith bin ‘Alqama, received a letter from the Prophet Muḥammad and asked three Najrānite clergymen, Sharḥabīl bin Wadā‘a, ‘Abdullah bin Sharḥabīl and Jabbār bin Fayyād, for their opinion about the Prophet Muḥammad. The three clerics told the bishop that God had already promised the Prophet Abraham to send a prophet from the descendants of his son, the Prophet Ishmael, and the person who sent this letter might be the intended prophet (al-Bayhaqī, 1988). This debate agrees with Ibn-Hishām’s statement regarding the Prophethood of Muḥammad, but it probably reflects a Biblical concept, based on its conception of Prophethood, used by those clerics to examine whether Muḥammad was a true prophet.

In addition, in the account reported by Muqātil (1979), there is an important question regarding the Prophethood that the two Najrānite leaders asked the Prophet Muḥammad concerning whether he is *Aḥmed* or not. Although Muqātil's account does not mention whether the two Najrānite leaders elicited a response from the Prophet, their question means that the understanding of Prophethood among the Christians of Najrān involved this other concept, which seems to have been based on their seeking through different versions of holy books, probably missing versions or texts.

In general, the Christians of Najrān, according to the above sources, seem to have had a positive view of the Prophet Muḥammad as probably a true prophet, because he represented a religion that differed from other polytheistic Arab religions of the time. He also stated faith in previous prophets, including Jesus Christ. However, a strong belief in the Christology of Jesus Christ, which fundamentally disagrees with Islam, influenced their official decision to remain Christians.

In addition to the story of *Mubāhala*, Muslim sources speak of other dialogues between Muslims and the Christians of Najrān, relating to other contentious issues that highlight additional theological concepts understood by Najrānite Christians. The first of these was related by al-Wāḥidī (1968) who spoke of an argument made by the bishop of Najrān against the Prophet Muḥammad on the concept of the creation of sin, the seas and heaven. The bishop theologically accepted Islam's concept of the creation of the seas and heaven, but refused it for sin. Also, al-Ṭabarī (1995) talked of a dialogue between Caliph 'Umar bin al-Khaṭṭāb and three Christians from Najrān, who questioned him on the location of Hellfire, in the light of the Qur'anic verse: "a Paradise as vast as the heavens and the earth" (Sūrat al-ʿImrān, verse 113). According to al-Ṭabarī (1995), the Caliph 'Umar bin al-Khaṭṭāb said: "do you see when night comes, where daylight is, and when daylight comes where night is?" They replied: "similar to your answer has been recounted in the Torah" (Vol. 4, p 94).

Both of these dialogues show how the Christians of Najrān share with Muslims a similar understanding of the creation of heaven and the seas, as well as the same conception of Paradise and Hellfire as a reality, in the same way as day and night. However, the disagreement by the bishop of Najrān on the creation of sin is significant, although the account of it does not provide a specific justification of why the bishop disagreed with the Muslim concept of sin.

In summary, it seems that the Christology of Jesus Christ was the central issue for the Christians of Najrān despite their seemingly disagreeing with it. The doctrinal diversity among those Najrānite Christians meant that they adopted different theological concepts of Jesus Christ. This is noticed in

the adoption by the Monophysites of the full divine nature, by the Nestorians of two separate divine and human natures, and by the Melchites of two divine and human natures of Jesus Christ. The Christians of Najrān also expressed their theological understanding of additional issues such as Prophethood, the creation of the seas and heaven, Paradise and Hellfire.

## 5.6 Clergy

The Christian community of Najrān had a body of clergy to regulate their rituals of worship. This body was divided into orders according to their ranks, roles and duties. For the Christians of Najrān in particular, the perception of the clergy by Muslim sources is sometimes based on Ibn-Hishām's statement concerning a particular encounter. According to Ibn-Hishām (1955), Abū al-Ḥārith bin 'Alqama was the main bishop (*Asquff*) of the Christians of Najrān and "their bishop, scholar and religious leader, who controlled their schools" (Ibn-Hishām, 1955, p 271). In addition to the bishop, there were two other leaders: "al-'Aqib, the leader of the people, a man of affairs, and their chief adviser whose opinion governed their policy, 'Abdul Massīḥ by name; Sayyid, their administrator who saw to transport and general arrangements, whose name was al-Ayham" (p 271). From this statement, Ibn-Jrais (2004) supposes that the clergy of the Najrānite Christians were subject to three main leaders: the bishop, the administrator and the chief adviser.

In fact, this assumption is not accurate in the case of the clergy of the Najrānite Christians. Instead, their clergy were not very different from those of other eastern Christian communities at that time. The clergy regularly comprised three levels of holy orders: bishop, priest and deacon. The issue to address here is to identify the holy orders of the Najrānite clergy, as well as the specific tasks and duties for each rank, and also uncover the local terms used to denote those orders.

Historically, the clergy of the Najrānite church developed over four main periods: its foundation, the Abyssinian occupation, the late pre-Islamic period and the Islamic period. The first period lasted from the beginning of the sixth century CE, until the persecution of Christians around 518 CE. For this period, the available sources, particularly eastern Christian ones, do not provide enough details concerning the establishment of the clergy for the Najrānite church, except what has already been discussed of the consecration of Paul I and Paul II as Monophysitic bishops of Najrān by Philoxenus of Mabbuga few years before Dhū Nuwās's invasion of Najrān in around 518 CE (Ya'qūb, 1966, Shahīd, 1971). *The Two Letters of Simeon of Bēth Arshām* (Hamilton and Brooks, 1899, Ya'qūb, 1966, Shahīd, 1971), *The Book of the Ḥimyarites* (Moberg, 1924) and *The*

*Martyrdom of Aretha* (Ibrāhīm, 2007) speak of the existence of the clergy for the Christians of Najrān by the first quarter of the sixth century CE. The three sources offer an important list of members of the clergy, including the number of priests, arch-priests, arch-deacons, deacons and deaconesses, as well as the bishop Paul II, who were murdered in the persecution of Najrānite Christians. *The Martyrdom of Aretha* (Ibrāhīm, 2007) offers further significant details regarding the role of women in the Najrānite clergy, as singers, deaconesses and virgin ascetics. However, these sources record that a significant proportion of the clergy were non-Najrānites from al-Ḥīra, Persia, Abyssinia and Byzantium, rather than local people (Moberg, 1924, Ya'qūb, 1966, Shahīd, 1971, Ibrāhīm, 2007).

These Christian sources show clearly that the clergy of Najrānite Christians existed well before the persecution of these Christians. They agree in their descriptions of the main ranks of the clergy, who were led by the bishop as the highest rank, followed by two lower ranks: priests and then deacons. The role of women in the clergy is significant because there were special jobs that were undertaken by women, such as deaconess and singer. According to the above Christian sources, the clergy of the Najrānite church seems to have been organised in a similar fashion to those of eastern Christian churches, since the establishment of this clergy relied on clerics coming from Syria, Mesopotamia and Abyssinia. In other words, the existence of non-Najrānite Christians in the Najrānite clergy points to the likelihood that the Najrānite clergy was organised along similar lines to the holy orders that were present in their countries of origin, as Najrān was a newly Christianised area at this time.

For the period of the Abyssinian occupation (525-597 CE), the Christian accounts reported by *The Book of the Himyarites* (Moberg, 1924), *The Martyrdom of Aretha* (Ibrāhīm, 2007) and Michael the Syrian (1996) talk of the re-establishment of the clergy of Najrān by the Abyssinian king Kālēb, who brought a Monophysitic bishop and a number of priests and deacons to Najrān. In addition, as already mentioned, a bishop called Sargis was consecrated for the Julianite sect around 550 CE (Michael the Syrian, 1996). From this, it can be seen that the clergy of the Najrānite church appear to have had complete holy orders, headed by a bishop and part of the Monophysitic church. This means the holy orders of the clergy of the Najrānite church were probably similar to those of the first clergy that was originally established with the arrival of Christianity. However, this clergy seems to have had a distinctive Monophysitic identity because most of its staff were Christian Monophysites. As mentioned before, this period appears to have seen a significant change in the increased pluralism of Christian sects. This involves the existence of a bishop for each sect, which



can be assumed for the two Monophysitic sects of Julianites and Jacobites during the Abyssinian period.

During the late pre-Islamic and early Islamic periods, the available information about the clergy of Najrān mainly comes from Muslim sources. These sources contain remarkable inconsistencies, as can be seen in two distinct view of points on the ranks of holy orders, with regard to their nomenclature and duties. The first of these can be assessed in the light of accounts reporting the story of the delegation of Najrānite Christians to the Prophet Muḥammad in 631 CE / 10 AH. According to Ibn-Hishām (1955), the Najrānite Christians delegation consisted of three main leaders; the bishop, al-‘Aqib, their chief adviser and al-Sayyid, their administrator as detailed previously.

The second view of point can be discussed in light of the covenants of the Prophet Muḥammad and his Caliphs, as well as Muslim works of genealogy, which highlight aspects of the organisation of the clergy of Najrānite Christians. Several Muslim works of genealogy, such as those by Ibn-Ḥazm (1948), Ibn al-Kalbī (1988) and Ibn-Durayd (1991), record a list of bishops of Najrān who were Arabs, such as Ilia’a bin Dhuhal bin ‘Amr al-Azdī, ‘Abdul Massīḥ bin Nahd al-Qhuḍā’ī, Quss bin Sā’ida al-Iyādī and Abū al-Ḥārith bin ‘Alqama al-Bakrī, who lived during the time of the Prophet Muḥammad. The letters and covenants of the Prophet Muḥammad and his Caliphs Abū Bakr aṣ-Ṣiddīq (632-634 CE / 11-13 AH) and ‘Umar ibn Al-Khattāb (634-644 CE / 13-23 AH) to the Najrānite Christians obviously furnish details of the holy orders of the clergy of Najrānite Christians, consisting of three particular ranks: bishops, priests and the final rank, represented by the term *Wāqif* (Ibn-Sa’ad, n.d., Ibn-Sallām, 1975, al-Balādhurī, 1987, Ibn-Zanjawayh, 2006).

Both points of view show noticeable confusion with regard to the terms used for the holy orders of the Najrānite clergy. Ibn-Hishām’s account provides terms that are not mentioned by Christian sources, particularly al-‘Aqib and al-Sayyid. On the other hand, the covenants of the Prophet Muḥammad and his Caliphs refer to the first and second ranks of the holy orders of the clergy of Najrānite Christians, bishops and priests, but also include the term *Wāqif*, which is almost non-existent in Christian sources. These irregular terms may be due to local use among Arabs toward Christian clerics, and their lack of familiarity with the meaning of some holy orders during the time under study. Examining the authority and responsibilities of these terms will provide further evidence of the actual holy orders that comprise the Najrānite Christian clergy.

For regular terms relating to the Najrānite clergy, there is agreement between both Christian and Muslim sources with regard to the status of the bishop as the highest rank of holy orders. His authority seems to have undergone significant changes during two periods, the pre-Islamic and early Islamic. Shahīd (2006), relying on al-Qalqashandī (1964) and Ibn-Khaldūn (1984), supposes that the bishops of Najrān played a role in preaching Christianity in their community, and used to baptise new Christian converts in church. Regardless of the accuracy of Shahīd's claim, the covenants of the Prophet Muḥammad and his Caliphs regulated these responsibilities, which included regular duties such as giving sermons on religious occasions, leading worshippers in prayer (*Imām*), giving legal opinions in religious matters (*Fatwā*) and judging legal matters between Christians.

The second rank of the holy orders of the Najrānite clergy is the priest, who was called *Quss* or *Qussīs* (al-Zabīdī, 1965, al-Farāhīdī, 1980, Ibn-Manzūr, 1994). The covenants do not provide much information concerning a priest's duties and tasks, except a reference to the Najrānite priests' rights to protect their position in church. There is only an indirect indication, given by the second part of *The Chronicle of Seert* (Ḥaddād, 2000) and Hebraeus (2012) concerning a debate about the holy orders of eastern Christian churches. Both sources agree that the major task of a priest is to lead worshippers in prayer. As previously mentioned, in the Najrānite Christian clergy; the roles, responsibilities and duties of the priesthood were most likely the same as those in other eastern Christian communities, due to the strong relations between groups, which can be seen in the consecration of bishops, the exchange of clerics between those communities and the provision of religious education.

With regard to irregular terms used to describe members of the clergy, the Ibn-Hishām account contains two such individuals: al-ʿAqib and al-Sayyid. He stated that the responsibilities of these were to arrange policy, transport and general arrangements. These responsibilities seem to be more secular, rather than a form of spiritual leadership as in the case of the bishop, Abū al-Ḥārith bin ʿAlqama. Here, it is useful to remember that the Christians of Najrān enjoyed autonomy in regulating their political, economic and religious affairs. Linking this supposition to the responsibilities of the three leaders (the bishop and these other two) supplies a possible meaning for both jobs: al-ʿAqib and al-Sayyid were administrative and political positions rather than religious leaders. The first Prophetic covenant with the Christians of Najrān supports this supposition because it includes political, economic and social terms and conditions, in addition to the regulation of religious positions. Thus, Ibn-Hishām probably described the political and economic leaders of

Najrānite Christians, rather than describing the holy orders of their clergy. Therefore, the three leaders may represent the members of the council of Najrānite Christian autonomy, which included but was not limited to their religious leadership. In other words, the delegation of Najrānite Christians probably included both the spiritual and secular leadership of the Christian community of Najrān.

The term *Wāqif* is mentioned in several Arabic dictionaries, which debate its actual meaning, and the duties involved. Ibn al-Athīr (1979), al-Farāhīdī (1980), Ibn-Manzūr (1994) and al-Zamakhsharī (2005) agree that the term *Wāqif* refers to a person who dedicates himself to serving the church. In other words, al-Zabīdī (1965) describes it as referring to a person who is responsible for the stewardship of the church, in particular protecting its cross from being stolen or broken, and putting it in place during worship. These sources evidently indicate that the term *Wāqif* refers to a level of holy orders of the Christian clergy specifically for Najrānite Christians, unlike other Christian sources, which cannot provide clear references to this particular term. Noticeably, the responsibilities of the *Wāqif* seem to be similar to the job of deacon in the church. According to Muslim lexicographers such as al-Farāhīdī (1980), Ibn-‘Abbād (1994) and Ibn-Manzūr (1994), the deacon (*Shammās*) is the lowest level of holy orders of the clergy and is responsible to assist in services of worship, especially for weekly prayer on Sunday and memorial prayer services during holidays. From this, it can be concluded that the term *Wāqif* simply appears a local term for the standard holy orders level of deacon, rather than being a special form of holy orders, as supposed by the above Muslim sources. Thus, the clergy of Najrānite Christians consisted, as mentioned earlier, of three levels of holy orders – bishops, priests and deacons – which most likely did not differ from those of other eastern Christian clergy in the ranking of their holy orders.

Regarding the status of Christian clergy in Najrān under Muslim rule, the covenants of the Prophet Muḥammad and Caliphs provide us with further details during the early Islamic period. In one of the Prophet’s covenants, the Christians of Najrān seemed to have more than one bishop, possibly one for each sect, because of the use of the plural term “bishops of Najrān”, instead of the singular, as mentioned in the letter sent by the Prophet Muḥammad to Najrānite Christians (al-Ya‘qūbī, 1883). In other words, there may have been one bishop for the Nestorians, whereas the Julianites and Jacobites had their own bishops, and so on. Secondly, the clergy of Najrānite Christians during this period appear to have had a specific Arabic identity and enjoyed relative autonomy, unlike during the Abyssinian occupation. This can be seen in the consecration of Arab bishops at the head of the Christian clergy in Najrān. Significantly, their autonomy was confirmed by the covenants of

the Prophet Muḥammad and the Caliph Abū-Bakr al-Ṣiddīq who guaranteed the independence of this clergy with regard to their religious authority, tasks and functions.

al-ʿĀyib (1998) examines the status of the Najrānite clergy during the period following the end of the Abyssinian occupation in South Arabia, around 597 CE. She notes that there was evidence of the prevalence of Arab clerics as providers of spiritual leadership for Najrānite Christians, as shown above. This prevalence, according to al-ʿĀyib (1998), can be evidence for the establishment of a local clergy for the Najrān church which enjoyed autonomy, without significant influence from the other eastern churches in Egypt, Abyssinia, Syria and Mesopotamia, after the end of the Abyssinian occupation of Yemen.

This suggestion can be assessed in the light of two issues. The first is the relationships that connected some bishops of Najrān, in particular Quss bin Sāʿida al-Iyādī and Abū al-Ḥārith bin ʿAlqama, with Byzantium (Ibn-Hishām, 1955, al-Qālī, 1978). The second is that, although most members of the Najrānite clergy were Arabs, they were mostly from tribes that did not live in Najrān during the period under discussion. This can be seen in the cases of the bishop Quss bin Sāʿida al-Iyādī, a member of the Banū Iyād tribe who mostly lived in Mesopotamia; the bishop ʿAbdul Massīḥ bin Nahd al-Qhuḍāʿī, whose tribe, the Qhuḍāʿa, lived in Ḥaḍramūt; and the well-known bishop Abū al-Ḥārith bin ʿAlqama, who belonged to the Banū Bakr bin Wāʿil, whose lands were located between Najd (central Arabia) and southern Mesopotamia (al-Hamdānī, 1978, al-Bakrī, 1983, Ibn al-Kalbī, 1988, al-Hamdānī, 2004 ).

From this information, it is likely that the Christians of Najrān enjoyed a state of semi-autonomy, as the consecration of Najrānite bishops was still performed by the eastern churches of Nestorianism and Monophysitism. However, this clergy seems to have become stronger and taken over increasing responsibility for regulating its internal affairs, as can be concluded from Ibn-Hishām's references to the authority of the bishop of Najrān, Abū al-Ḥārith, which included organising most of the spiritual affairs of his community. The clergy of Najrān seem to have acquired greater influence, not only with Najrānite Christians, but also with most of the Christians of South Arabia. Najrān, therefore, became the centre of southern Arabian Christianity, where the important fact was that the bishop was an Arab, regardless of his specific tribal affiliation.

In general, the clergy of the Najrānite Christians appears to have consisted of three major orders, bishop, priest, and deacon, and each order had its own tasks and responsibilities related to the rituals of worship. This clergy evidently developed over the period under study to become considerably

more Arabic in identity, and gained greater autonomy in the late pre-Islamic period and the early decades of Islam. There was usually a bishop for each Christian sect, due to the doctrinal split in the Christian community in Najrān during that later pre-Islamic period.

## **5.7 Rituals of worship**

The existence of Christians in Najrān implies the performance of rituals of worship such as baptism, prayer, fasting, pilgrimage, reciting the Bible and the observance of religious celebrations. Unfortunately, there is little information on such practices from the available Christian and Muslim sources. *The Book of Ethicon* for Hebraeus (1967) offers a little indirect information on how the Jacobites performed their rituals of worship. This book was originally written to provide general guidance for how Jacobite Christians should perform their rituals of worship correctly, rather than giving a historical account. Thus, Cheikho (1989) stated that *The Book of Ethicon* may be a guide for the Bar Hebraeus sect only, rather than for other Christian sects. The available Christian and Muslim sources do, however, shed some light on how the Christians of Najrān performed the four main rituals of worship: baptism, prayer, pilgrimage and monastic life.

### **5.7.1 Baptism**

The term “baptism” is defined as the official adoption of Christianity. Probably the first Najrānite Christian, Hayyān, was baptised in al-Ḥīra by its clergy, and when he returned to his native home of Najrān, Hayyān practised baptism among his own people (Ibn-Sulaymān, 1899, Scher, 1907). Another account given by *The Book of the Ḥimyarites* (Moberg, 1924) narrates how the Najrānite believer Afʿū, and later his son ʿAbdullah, were baptised into the church of al-Ḥīra in a great ceremony. Similarly, an Abyssinian account offered by *The Acts of Azkir* (Budge, 1928), claims that the Abyssinian evangelist ʿAzkir baptised new Najrānite converts to Christianity before the Ḥimyarite invasion of Najrān.

These Christian accounts show how the practice of baptism came to Najrān, and subsequently became compulsory for those Najrānites who converted to Christianity. Significantly, baptism was regularly performed in church by the Najrānites themselves, with a religious ceremony that included several rituals, such as washing new converts to Christianity with water and declaring the new convert’s belief in God, the Son and the Holy Spirit. During the time under discussion, there are few

details explaining the custom of baptism among Najrānite Christians, but it seems to have been an official practice specifically reserved for new converts and infants.

### **5.7.2 Prayer**

Muslim sources shed light on some aspects of how the Christians of Najrān prayed, including the direction and timing of prayer. The first account was provided by al-Ḥamawī (1995) and al-Iṣfahānī (1997) who stated that the Christians of Najrān met at their great church every Sunday to perform their Sunday prayer and then go to receive delegations, visitors and poets. The second statement reported by Ibn-Hishām (1955) recounted the arrival of a delegation of Najrānite Christians in Medina. He related that those Najrānite Christians entered the Prophet's mosque after afternoon prayer and then, when it was time for their prayer, they began to pray towards the east. At that point, according to Ibn-Hishām, the Prophet's companions wanted to prevent the Christians from praying inside the mosque but the Prophet Muḥammad refused this and allowed the Christians to complete their prayer.

These two accounts show that the Najrānite Christians were keen on performing prayer at a particular time, wherever the location. But it is noticeable that Muslim sources were not very familiar with Christian prayers, except for the reference to the Sunday prayer as a weekly prayer. This can be seen in the account of the prayer of the delegation of Najrānite Christians in the Prophet's mosque. This particular prayer seems to have been a daily prayer, perhaps the afternoon prayer in the Hebraeus (1967) categorisation of daily Christian prayers. In other words, according to Ibn-Hishām's (1955) account, the prayer performed by the delegation of Najrān Christians in the Prophet's mosque appears to have been a type of congregational prayer commanded by their spiritual leader rather than individual prayer, because the Christian delegation prayed together. Moreover, the lack of understanding displayed by the Muslim sources can be noted in the concept of facing east while praying. Although Hebraeus (1967) confirms this as one of the compulsory rules of Christian prayer, they do not provide the reason behind setting the direction of prayer as toward the east. In general, the Christians of Najrān definitely practised daily prayer, a weekly prayer every Sunday and special prayers for religious celebrations. This practice of prayer was probably performed in line with set rules, such as setting the direction of prayer towards the east, performing ablutions, calling the faithful to prayer by using a bell and setting the time of prayer.

### 5.7.3 Pilgrimage

The Christians of Najrān apparently went on pilgrimages as a major component of their worship, as other Christian groups did during the time under study. There is, however, debate concerning the kind of pilgrimage they undertook, and which sacred places they visited. There are two accounts reported by Muslim and Christian sources that consider Najrān to be a destination of pilgrimage, particularly during the pre-Islamic period. The difference between the Ka'ba of Najrān and the holy church has already been highlighted (see sub-section 5.3.1), but it is important to examine Najrān again as an object of pilgrimage. The first Muslim account, reported by al-Bakrī (1983), al-Iṣfahānī (1991) and al-Ḥamawī (1995), narrates that the church of Najrān was a destination for pilgrimage by different Arab groups who did not perform to Mecca to Ḥajj. It regards this church as one of three holy churches visited by Arab Christians on pilgrimage; the other destinations were the church in al-Ḥīra of the Christian Lakhmids and the church of the Christian Ghassanides in Syria.

Additionally, a relevant account by al-Hamdānī (1989) revealed an obscure reason behind the pilgrimage to the church in Najrān. He regarded Najrān as one of the places for *Mawāḍi' al-Niyāḥa* (morning for the dead), which were visited by worshippers during pre-Islamic times. However, al-Hamdānī did not offer further details concerning the timing of the pilgrimage or the religious identity of the people who came to Najrān for the *Mawāḍi' al-Niyāḥa*.

From the above Muslim accounts, it is clear that the holy church of Najrān was a place of pilgrimage for the Christians of Najrān and other unknown groups who did not go to Mecca. Nevertheless, the image given by these sources is still confused. The Muslim accounts do not mention the purpose for making this church a place of pilgrimage. Neither do they specify the approximate date for performing this pilgrimage or the types of rituals of pilgrimage that were performed at this church, except the mention of performing Sunday prayer. Furthermore, these sources do not clarify the religious identity of the groups who performed the pilgrimage to the holy church of Najrān; al-Hamdānī only stated that the reason for performing the pilgrimage to Najrān is for unknown dead people, which will be discussed below.

The second account is reported by eastern Christian sources, *The Book of the Himyarites* (Moberg, 1924), *The Acts of Azkir* (Budge, 1928), *The Acts of Gregentios* (Berger, 2006) and *The Martyrdom of Aretha* (Ibrāhīm, 2007). These four works contain important references to the construction of a great church, which was made a holy church, by the Abyssinian King Kālēb, where many Najrānite martyrs were burned to death and buried. However, *The Acts of Azkir* (Budge, 1928) offers a

valuable statement, which says that “King Kālēb established the commemoration of the martyrs there” (p168). An additional account, provided by the *Chronicle of Zachariah of Mitylene*<sup>67</sup> (Hamilton and Brooks, 1899) and *The Chronicle of Zuqnān* (Harrak, 1999), concerning Simeon’s first letter, gives direct evidence of the adopting of Najrān’s church as a location of pilgrimage. It recounts that Simeon asked the Archimandrite of Gabbula to adopt the memory of the Najrānite martyrs as a religious celebration to be commemorated by eastern Christians every year.

The above Christian sources offer further details that cannot be seen in the available Muslim sources. These details throw light on the particular reason for adopting the church of Najrān as an object of pilgrimage, the founder of this pilgrimage, the identity of the pilgrims to Najrān and the approximate date for performing it. The reason for using Najrān’s church as an object of pilgrimage apparently began with Simeon of Bēth Arshām’s proposal to the Monophysitic church to adopt the memory of Najrānite martyrs as a religious celebration for its inhabitants, most likely the Feast Day of the Martyrs, and that this should be commemorated across their churches in the east. Consequently, the Abyssinian king accepted the Monophysitic church’s proposal and most probably established the church of Aretha and the Martyrs of Najrān as a holy place for Christian pilgrims to visit and to celebrate the commemoration of the Najrānite martyrs. The purpose for establishing Najrān as place of Christian pilgrimage therefore becomes clear and gives an indication of what al-Hamdānī meant by referring to “morning the dead”. This may simply be another expression for those Christians who were martyred and became an object of pilgrimage.

The establishment of the Najrānite martyrs as objects of pilgrimage is most likely true, since eastern Christian, both Monophysites and Nestorians, established shrines for their saints and martyrs and made these into places of pilgrimage, as can be seen from a valuable account provided by the *Patrologia Graeca* (Transl. Cheikho, 1989, p 397). This account speaks of the flourishing of pilgrimages to the shrines of St. Simeon Stylites, St. Sergius and St. Bacchus in Syria during the sixth and seventh centuries CE. Most importantly, it directly indicates that the Christians of Ḥimyar, most likely Najrānites, were one of the groups who came to these shrines for pilgrimage. Although this account does not offer further details, such as the dates of visits or the kind of rituals performed at these shrines, it provides additional evidence that the Christians of Najrān practised pilgrimage

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67 Zacharias of Mytilene was a bishop and historian of the Church, who was born in Gaza in Palestine around 465 CE and died around 536 CE (Afrām, 1976).



not only to their holy church in Najrān, but probably also to other eastern Christian shrines in Syria and Mesopotamia.

In summary, both Muslim and Christian sources agree in their consideration of the Najrānite church as an object of pilgrimage for Christians during the pre-Islamic period.

#### **5.7.4 Monastic life**

Shahīd (1979) believes that monastic life played a significant role in the religious life of Najrānite Christians, as a result of the spread of monasteries across the Najrān region. He claims that it is difficult to investigate aspects of monastic life, due to the scarcity of available information, except what can be learned from the Prophet Muḥammad's covenant with the delegation of Najrānite Christians, which contains an important reference to monasticism as one protected activity for those Najrānite Christians. Nonetheless, there is actually more to learn from a number of Christian and Muslim sources, including the Prophet Muḥammad's covenant itself.

Probably the first references to monasticism were those related by *The Book of the Ḥimyarites* (Moberg, 1924) and *The Martyrdom of Aretha* (Ibrāhīm, 2007), which talk of the execution of monks and monastic women by the Ḥimyarite king. This short reference gives clear evidence of the practice of monasticism among Najrānite Christians from an early period, around the time of the establishment of the first church there.

During the period under study, the number of hermitages and monasteries seems to have increased across the Najrān region, as shown in the sub-section 5.3.3. This offers evidence for a flourishing of monasticism, as both types of building were allocated for monks who devoted themselves to aspects of monasticism. In addition, the notable stability of political, economic, social and religious affairs in the region during that time suggests that Christians were able to practice monasticism freely.

Muslim sources provide useful details concerning two Najrānite characters who practised aspects of monasticism. al-Iṣbahānī (1986), al-Bayhaqī (1988), al-Iṣfahānī (1997) and al-Kharkūshī (2003) related that the well-known Najrānite bishop, Quss bin Sā'ida al-Iyādī, used to spend long days alone in nomadic lands to worship, and perhaps used to devote himself in the great church of Najrān, as Ibn-Sa'īd (1982) claims. Regardless of the extent to which these details are accurate, they reflect a common practice among Christians of Najrān, in particular their clerics.

The second character is the Najrānite monk Layth bin Abī Shammar al-Zabīdī, who lived at the time of the Prophet Muḥammad. Al-Bayhaqī (1988) tells how this monk was spending his time alone in a hermitage when the delegation of Najrānite Christians returned from Medina and told him about their meeting with the Prophet Muḥammad. Layth bīn Abī Shammar al-Zabīdī promptly ended his seclusion and travelled to Medina to urgently meet the Prophet Muḥammad, bringing an expensive black cloak as a present to the Prophet in order to find out more details about Islam (al-Bayhaqī, 1988). This statement shows how Najrānite monks practised monasticism by being alone, isolating themselves from others and devoting most of their time to worship. These monastic customs practised in Najrān were probably similar to other monastic customs of the time, particularly among eastern Christians during the period under study. In this regard, several Muslim scholars, such as Ibn-Qutaybah (1979), al-Wāḥidī (1994) and Ibn-Sīdah (1996) in addition to the eastern Christian scholar Hebraeus (1967), agree that a worshipper who wanted to follow a monastic life was required to follow set rules such as avoiding meeting people, wearing black cloaks, being sexually abstinent, refraining from eating meat, eating only bread, practising fasting, and devoting most nights to the performance of prayer and reciting the Gospel.

In the early Islamic period, the covenant of the Prophet Muḥammad unequivocally refers to monasticism as a major feature of Christianity by saying that “it is not permitted to remove a bishop from his bishopric, a monk from his monastic life, or anchorite from his vocation as a hermit” (Transl. Morrow, 2013, p113). The inclusion of monastic life as something worthy of being protected, in addition to the other rituals, reflects its importance as a flourishing practice in the religious life of the Christians of Najrān.

In summary, the practice of monasticism seems to have flourished as a major aspect of worship among the Christians of Najrān, and clerics appear to have formed the majority of people who practised it in their places of worship.

## **5.8 Conclusion**

Significant conclusions can be drawn from this chapter. There are many details concerning the arrival of Christianity in Najrān that are still debatable, such as the approximate date, the country of origin of the first Christian preacher in Najrān and the identity of this preacher. There are obvious differences between Christian and Muslim sources, but three versions – Nestorian, Abyssinian and Muslim – seem to be the most acceptable, due to their similarities in details and context. This study

suggests that the three versions perhaps best reflect the missionary activities by Christian traders who preached Christianity in Najrān before it became a Christian centre.

When considering places of worship, the examination of the Ka'ba of Najrān shows that there are considerable differences between the church allocated for pilgrimage and the place owned by Banū ad-Dayyān, the chieftain of the Banū al-Hārith bin Ka'b tribe, and this Ka'ba appears to have been a venue for social gatherings, rather than a church. Najrānite Christians probably had three main types of places of worship: churches, monasteries and hermitages. The difference between these three types is related to their locations, shapes, the rituals of worship held there and the people who lived or worshipped there. The research shows that the churches were more formal settings, where prayers and public meetings were regularly held, and they were usually located in populated areas. In contrast, hermitages and monasteries were established for the practice of monasticism and most probably existed outside populated areas; worshippers lived alone in both of these places, but hermitages were substantially smaller than monasteries and frequently contained only one worshipper.

The doctrines followed by Najrānite Christians are a particularly significant issue because there is no agreement between modern researchers as to what the official doctrines adopted by Najrānite Christians were. The research examines the doctrinal development of Najrānite Christians from the introduction of Christianity to Najrān to the early Islamic period. It concludes that Monophysitism was probably the dominant doctrine in Najrān during the Abyssinian occupation due to the noticeable support offered by the Monophysitic churches in Egypt, Abyssinia and Syria to Najrānite Christians, which can be seen in the consecration of bishops and the dispatching of clergy. However, it is clear that the doctrines of Najrānite Christians changed during three distinct periods, the Abyssinian and Persian occupations, and the early Islamic period, to consist of a diverse range of doctrines that included Monophysites (both Jacobites and Julianites), Nestorians and Melchites. The impact of political factors is noticeable in the development of this diversity. However, there are additional economic considerations to be taken into account, due to the fact that Najrān became a centre of trade for Christian traders, as can be seen from Najrān relations with Byzantium.

The chapter debates the major theological concepts understood by Najrānite Christians, through accounts of their dialogues with Muslims. These include critical issues such as the Christology of Jesus, Mary, Prophethood, Paradise, Hellfire and creation. The dialogue between the Prophet Muḥammad and the delegation of Najrānite Christians shows that it was likely that there was

considerable disagreement between the Christians of Najrān concerning the Christology of Jesus, due to their doctrinal diversity. In other words, Monophysites adopted a belief in the one divine nature of Jesus Christ, whereas Nestorians embraced two separate divine and human natures and Melchitism adopted the Chalcedonian formula for Christ as the union of both human and divine natures in one body.

The position of the Christians of Najrān concerning the Prophethood of the Prophet Muḥammad is an interesting issue. They seem to have had a positive view of him as a probable true prophet, which may have been based on their Biblical understanding of the continuation of Prophethood. Additional issues given attention in Muslim-Najrānite Christian dialogues included the concepts of Paradise, Hellfire and creation.

The discussion examines accounts offered by both Muslim and Christian sources concerning the clergy of the Najrānite church, and concludes that there seems to have been misunderstandings in Muslim sources with regard to the clergy of the Christians of Najrān, particularly since the delegation of Najrānite Christians seems to have contained political and economic community leaders, as well as their bishop. Therefore, the clergy of Najrānite Christians is shown to have comprised three levels of holy orders: bishop, priest and deacon, each of which had different tasks and responsibilities, as well as different levels of authority.

The chapter ends by discussing four rituals of worship: baptism, prayer, pilgrimage and monastic life. Baptism was perhaps the first ritual to arrive in Najrān, potentially with the first Najrānite convert, and became an official ritual for new converts and infants, and was normally practised in church. The research shows that prayer was the major ritual of worship, and consisted of daily prayers, weekly prayers and, most probably special prayers on specific religious occasions. Prayers were most likely performed in line with rules that governed such issues as their timing, facing east, performing ablutions and calling the faithful to prayer with the use of a bell.

On the topic of pilgrimage, the research concludes that Najrān was an object of Christian pilgrimage, possibly because a church was built on the place where Najrānite Christians were martyred, which was made into a shrine for Christian pilgrims to visit. Christians of Najrān potentially performed pilgrimages outside their region, travelling to other Christian shrines, particularly in Syria and Mesopotamia, during the period under study. Finally, monastic life seems to have flourished in Najrān due to the stability of the Christian community's affairs during this period. This flourishing can be seen in the increasing number of hermitages and monasteries in

which monastic life was practised. Most monks who devoted themselves to worshipping in these places seem to have been clerics.

## **Chapter 6**

### **The Early History of Islam in Najrān (1-40 AH / 622-661 CE): Its Arrival, Spread, Policy towards Other Religions, and Influence on the Religious Structure**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

The arrival of Islam in Najrān subsequently led to major changes in the religious structure of this region during the period covered by the current chapter. More specifically, Muslim rule over the region, and hence the spread of Islam, strongly impacted the existence of the three main existing religions: polytheism, Christianity and Judaism. This raises a significant question: to what extent did Islam contribute to the religious structure of the region as a multi-religious society? In other words, did the Muslim authorities adopt an effective and fixed policy to spread Islam while coexisting with other religions, and was this policy at the same time able to establish peaceful coexistence between religious groups in Najrānite society ?

The current chapter seeks to investigate the impact of Islam on Najrān's multi-religious society by debating several issues. The discussion will begin by exploring the early connections between the Prophet Muḥammad and the people of Najrān after he launched his call to Islam in Mecca prior to formally contacting the two main powers of Najrān: the Christian community and the polytheists of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka'b tribe. The research will also examine the policy of spreading Islam in Najrān, in terms of adopting several practices, such as sending missions, building mosques and *Katātīb*, and scholarly trips. In the third section, the discussion will focus on the policies of the Muslim rulers – the Prophet and his Caliphs – towards non-Muslims communities in terms of their religion, security and property. The final section will assess the impact of this policy on the coexistence of Najrānite society in terms of its ability to establish tolerance towards the political, religious and economic situations of both the Christian and Jewish communities.

#### **6.2 Early connections between Islam and Najrān**

A significant question is whether or not Islam reached Najrān during the early period of the Prophet Muḥammad's call to Islam, in particular during the Meccan period (610-622 CE). There seem to have been early connections between the Prophet Muḥammad and the people of Najrān dating back

to this period. Muslim historians such as Ibn-Hishām (1955), Ibn-Kathīr (1988) and al-Suhaylī (2000) referred to the coming of around twenty Christians, probably from Najrān, to Mecca to meet the Prophet Muḥammad after hearing his call when they were travelling in Abyssinia. According to these historians, the Christian delegation debated with the Prophet Muḥammad on some issues of his religion. He related some verses of the Qurʾān to them; they believed him and perhaps accepted Islam.

From this account, it is noticeable that these historians were not certain of the identity of the Christians and whether they were from Najrān or another location. Therefore, this incident may reflect a connection between the Prophet Muḥammad and Christianity, rather than an actual relationship between the Prophet Muḥammad and the Christian community in Najrān. It is true that there were possibly economic relationships between Najrān and Mecca, as explained in Chapter Two (see section 2.4), but the impact of this meeting in establishing an early presence of Islam among Najrānites seems to be non-existent during the Prophetic period, until 8 AH / 630 CE.

More specifically, the early connections between the Prophet Muḥammad and Najrān can be observed in another brief meeting between the Prophet Muḥammad and some people of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Kaʿb on the Ḥajj, when the Prophet Muḥammad invited them to accept Islam, as he used to do every year during the Meccan period (Ibn-Saʿad, n.d., al-Afghānī, 1974, al-Zurqānī, 1996). The Banū al-Ḥārith bin Kaʿb did not accept his invitation, but this meeting offers an additional and obvious reference to relations between the Prophet Muḥammad and Najrān. This episode confirms the conclusion that, as suggested in the previous paragraph, Islam had not established a real influence in Najrān by then.

In the early years of the Medinan period,<sup>68</sup> which began with the establishment of the Muslim state in Medina in 1 AH / 622 CE, there seems to have been a presence of some Najrānite Christians in Medina before the expulsion of the final Jewish group, the Banū Qurayẓa, from Medina in 5 AH / 627 CE (Ibn-Hishām, 1955, al-Ṭabarī, 1987). Ibn-Hishām (1955) related that a number of Christians from Najrān and rabbis from Medina's Jews met with the Prophet Muḥammad at the same time. The Christian and Jewish groups disputed with each other over the truth of the Prophethood of Jesus Christ. In another meeting, Ibn-Hishām (1955) narrated that some Jews from

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68 Most biographies of the Prophet Muḥammad call the period of his life in Mecca the “Meccan period”, and the rest of his life in Medina the “Medinan period” (Ibn-Hishām, 1955, Watt, 1956).

Medina and Christians from Najrān met the Prophet Muḥammad and they argued about whether the Prophet Abraham was a Jew or a Christian.

Regardless of what they argued, both occasions show that the existence of relations between Muslims in Medina and the people of Najrān was most likely, due to the commercial relationships between Najrān and the al-Ḥijāz region, including Medina, as discussed in Chapter Two (section 2.4). These relations, however, had not yet been established officially, because both sides – the Prophet Muḥammad and the leadership of the Christians of Najrān – had not engaged in official contact by then, at least not by the beginning of 9 AH / 630 CE. Muslim sources speak of southern Arabian tribal delegations who were sent on behalf of their peoples to declare their faith, when the Prophet Muḥammad invited them officially. These sources list delegations from Hamdān, Khawlān, Daws, Khath‘am, al-Azd, Kinda, al-Ashā‘irah, Ṣudā and Ḥimyar (Ibn-Sa‘ad, n.d., al-Ṭabarī, 1987, al-Wāqidī, 1989). Those sources did not include any indication of a delegation from Najrān. This evidently means that Najrān had not yet officially sent its delegation to Medina.

Muslim sources report details on two Quryashī poets, ‘Abdullah bin al-Ziba‘rā<sup>69</sup> and Hubayra bin Abī Wahb al-Makhzūmī,<sup>70</sup> who fled to Najrān when the Prophet Muḥammad and his Muslim army conquered Mecca in 8 AH / 630 CE (Ibn-Hishām, 1955, al-Wāqidī, 1989, Ibn al-Athīr, 1994, al-Balādhurī, 1996). According to al-Wāqidī (1989), both poets told the people of Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b that the Quraysh had been defeated and Mecca had been taken by the Prophet Muḥammad, and he might invade Najrān soon which made the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b tribe prepare to fight the Prophet Muḥammad’s armies by restoring their fortresses and summoning the tribe’s troops.

This account supports the suggestion that Islam had not yet been accepted in Najrān. It also offers evidence of the attitude of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b tribe after hearing the news of the defeat of the Quryash and the subjection of Mecca to Muslim rule. This attitude can be assumed from the preparations for war and their refusal to become subjects of Islam, unlike other Arab tribes who accepted Islam as a consequence of the conquest of Mecca in the following year. Here, an

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69 ‘Abdullah bin Qais bin Adī bin al-Ziba‘rā was a Qurayshī poet during the pre-Muslim and early Muslim periods. Although he had used his poetry to attack the Prophet Muḥammad and Islam, bin al-Ziba‘rā converted to Islam after the conquest of Mecca in 8 AH / 630 CE (Ibn al-Athīr, 1994, al-Balādhurī, 1996, Meisami and Starkey, 1998).

70 Hubayra bin Abī Wahb al-Makhzūmī was a Qurayshī poet and noble who fled to Najrān when Muslim armies conquered Mecca. He spent the rest of his life there, until he died in around 10 AH / 631 CE (Ibn al-Athīr, 1994, al-Balādhurī, 1996, Ibn-Ḥajar, 2010).



interesting question can be asked as to why the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b tribe took an aggressive attitude toward the Muslim state in this period of time. The answer to this question can be read in light of their political and military alliance with the Christian community. This alliance brought political and economic advantages that were represented in both local sides enjoying political independence and stability, and this stability led to economic growth, as detailed in Chapter Two (see sub-section 2.5.3). It is, therefore, logical that the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b would maintain these advantages by fighting those who threatened the political independence of Najrān.

In summary, the above details reveal early connections between Islam and Najrān since the Meccan period. This means the news of the Prophet Muḥammad’s call was probably known in Najrān. However, these connections do not appear to have led to the establishing of a real presence of Islam in Najrān at that time. It could be suggested that Islam had not quite been accepted yet in this region, unlike other southern Arabian regions, which sent delegations to declare their faith in Medina.

### **6.3 Islam’s domination of Najrān**

In Chapter Two, it has been shown that there were two main powers controlling the region of Najrān: the Christian community and the polytheists of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b tribe (sub-section 2.5.3). Therefore, it is not surprising to see that the Prophet Muḥammad dealt with the two main powers of Najrān. In this section, the discussion will detail the Prophet Muḥammad’s policy toward each group separately, as well as the policy towards the Jews and Zoroastrians, who formed the minor religious groups in the region.

#### **6.3.1 The submission of the Christian community**

The formal relationships between Islam and Najrān began with the contact of the Prophet Muḥammad with the Christian community in 9 AH / 630 CE. Some Muslim historians such as Ibn-Sa‘ad (n.d.), al-Ya‘qūbī (1883) and al-Bayhaqī (1988), recorded that the Prophet Muḥammad sent a letter to the bishops of Najrān, inviting them to choose one of three options: acceptance of Islam, paying *Jizyah*, or war. According to al-Bayhaqī (1988), the bishop, Abū al-Ḥārith bin ‘Alqama, was shocked when he read the Prophet’s letter and then called a public meeting of Christian people in Najrān. The group decided to send a delegation to meet the Prophet Muḥammad and find out further details of his call to Islam.

Here, a significant question can be addressed, regarding the reason why the Prophet Muḥammad began his relationship with Najrān through the Christian community, and not the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Kaʿb. There are perhaps two factors behind this. First, most Najrānite Christians lived in the city centre and its surrounding rural areas, where economic activity was greatest, as concluded in Chapter Two (section 2.3). This enabled the Christians to hold the economic power in the region. Therefore, the Muslims may have thought that the domination of the city centre and economic power would enable a Muslim authority to control other parts of the Najrān region, especially the Bedouin districts where most of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Kaʿb lived. Second, the influence of Byzantium still existed among Christians, especially in spiritual matters, which was shown by the adoption of Melchitism, the official doctrine of the Byzantine Church, by many Najrānite Christians, as examined in Chapter Five (see section 5.4). This factor was probably more important than the first factor, because it concerned an external power that was a rival to the Muslim state at the time. In the same year as the meeting, 9 AH / 630 CE, the threat of a Byzantine invasion of the Muslim state was very real. This can be seen in the military campaign to Tabūk <sup>71</sup>, which was commanded by the Prophet Muḥammad himself for the purpose of defending Arabia from the Byzantine-northern Arab Christian military coalition on its northern borders (Ibn-Saʿad, n.d., Ibn-Hishām, 1955, al-Ṭabarī, 1987). Therefore, the Prophet Muḥammad probably expected that the Christian community represented a greater risk to the spread of Islam to Najrān than the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Kaʿb did, due to their close relations with Byzantium. He therefore decided to deprive Byzantium of its influence in South Arabia, by making subjects of the Christian community there, who were the allies of Byzantium.

In addition, the mention of military conflict, as one of the options presented in the Prophet Muḥammad's letter, suggests certain things. First, it implies that the influence of the Muslim state might have reached the regions bordering Najrān, which means that the Muslims were now able to threaten Najrān. Secondly, the threat of using the military option clearly did not aim to force Christians to convert to Islam, but represented a step towards conquering Najrān politically, by neutralising the Christian community before the next step of making the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Kaʿb subject to Muslim rule, as will be seen later.

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<sup>71</sup> Tabūk was the name of well-known town in the northwest of the Arabian Peninsula where the Prophet Muḥammad and his army camped for around a month to fight the Byzantine troops (al-Bakrī, 1983, al-Ḥamawī, 1995).

In the rest of the story, a number of Muslim historians such as Ibn-Sa‘ad (n.d.), al-Ya‘qūbī (1883), Ibn-Hishām (1955), Muqātil (1979), al-Iṣbahānī (1986) and al-Balādhurī (1987) agreed that the Prophet Muḥammad received this delegation after his return from a military campaign to Tabūk in Ramaḍān in 09/9 AH / January 631 CE. They recorded that the Christian delegation consisted of around sixty men, fourteen of whom were nobles. It was led by three men: the bishop, Abū al-Ḥārith bin ‘Alqama, the al-‘Aqib, ‘Abdul Massīḥ bin Dāriss al-Kindī, and the al-Sayyid, al-Ayham.

However, al-Bayhaqī (1988) argued that the Christians of Najrān had dispatched three clergymen, , Sharḥabīl bin Wadā‘a, ‘Abdullah bin Sharḥabīl and Jabbār bin Fayyāḍ before the coming of the well-known delegation of Najrānite Christians mentioned above. He related that the three clergymen had a meeting with the Prophet Muḥammad that resulted in a peaceful covenant written by the Prophet Muḥammad, after which they returned to Najrān and delivered the covenant to the bishop of Najrān. Later, the bishop and other nobles from Najrān came to the Prophet Muḥammad and remained with him for a period of time, hearing about the Qur’an, but did not convert to Islam. When they decided to return to Najrān, the Prophet wrote another peaceful covenant with the bishop, Abū al-Ḥārith (al-Bayhaqī, 1988).

The available Muslim sources obviously focused on the major delegation that was led by the bishop. Nevertheless, the account of al-Bayhaqī seems highly reliable in giving the full account of the relationship between the Prophet Muḥammad and the Christians of Najrān. This may be due to the attention of other Muslim sources being focused on the incident of *Mubāhala*, or they may be not have been fully familiar with al-Bayhaqī’s sources and the narrators of his account. The likelihood of al-Bayhaqī’s account being true can be seen in its inclusion of two covenants that strongly support the probability of there being two meetings. Noticeably, the text of the second covenant indicates the bishop Abū al-Ḥārith bin ‘Alqama specifically, and just affirms the protection of the Christians of Najrān, as the Prophet Muḥammad stipulated in the first covenant. Significantly, it does not refer to the regulation of the *Jizyah*, or to what kind of obligations the non-Muslims of Najrān would have towards the Muslim government, unlike the first covenant, which reported in detail the procedure for paying the *Jizyah* (see Appendix 1: Document 2 and Document 3). This perhaps offers evidence to assume that this covenant is an affirmation of the first, more detailed, covenant. Regardless of how many Najrānite delegations visited the Prophet Muḥammad, however, the indisputable result is that the Christians of Najrān became subject to Muslim rule, but retained their faith.

In Christian sources, *The Chronicle of Seert* (Scher, 1907) and Hebraeus (2012) offer some details about the coming of the delegation of Najrān Christians to meet the Prophet Muḥammad in Medina. *The Chronicle of Seert* (Scher, 1907) relates that there was a representative delegation of Christians of Najrān, headed by al-Sayyad al-Ghassānī, ‘Abd Joshua’, Abraham the Monk, Ibn-Ḥarah and the bishop Jesus, who came to meet the Prophet Muḥammad in Medina and brought him precious gifts. Similarly, Hebraeus (2012) recounted that the Christians of Najrān sent their delegation, which was commanded by their chief, al-Sayyid, and their bishop, Joshua, to the Prophet Muḥammad in Medina. Unlike the Muslim sources, neither account gives further details with regard to the purpose that made those Christians travel to Medina, whether it was due to a letter from the Prophet Muḥammad or not. The list of the Christian delegation offered by *The Chronicle of Seert* clearly differs from those recorded by Muslim sources (Ibn-Hishām 1955, Muqātil, 1979, al-Bayhaqī, 1988). There is just one exception, a reference to al-Sayyid, who was probably the same person mentioned by the Muslim sources.

In short, both Muslim and Christian sources entirely agree that the Christians of Najrān agreed to be subject to the authority of the Prophet Muḥammad in exchange for being given full protection, as will be discussed later. However, there is an important question as to why the Christian of Najrān accepted a peaceful submission to his authority. Lecker (2010) considers the economic factor as perhaps the main reason behind this submission, because the expansion of Islam presented a risk to their economic activities. In fact, the military factor appears to have been more serious than the economic, because the Muslim influence had already reached South Arabia. As direct evidence, al-Ṭabarī (1995) recorded that when the leaders of the Najrānite Christian delegation decided to make a peaceful agreement with the Prophet Muḥammad, they said: “we do not have the ability to fight the Arabs, but we will make peace (*ṣalah*) with you” (Vol. 6. p 479). This statement shows what the leaders of the Christians of Najrān considered the military power of the Muslim state to be, a state which had been able to gather most of the Arab tribes for an urgent confrontation, as had happened during the time they met with the Prophet.

In summary, it can be concluded that the Christian community became subjects of the Muslim state, although they retained their Christianity. This submission consequently enabled the Prophet Muḥammad to spread his religion in Najrān in the next step of his policy, by taking a stance toward the other Najrānite power, the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b, as discussed below.

### 6.3.2 The Polytheists of Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b

This tribe was the biggest tribal power in Najrān because it controlled the largest area of land in the region, as discussed in Chapter Two (section 2.3). The Prophet Muḥammad, therefore, directed his attention towards bringing this tribe under Islam. Early Muslim historians such as Ibn-Sa‘ad (n.d.), Ibn-Hishām (1955), al-Ṭabarī (1987) and al-Balādhurī (1996) recorded that the Prophet Muḥammad dispatched Khālīd bin al-Walīd with 400 men to the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b tribe in Najrān around the month of Rabī‘ al-Thānī 10 AH / August 631 CE. The Prophet ordered Khālīd bin al-Walīd to invite the people of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b to Islam three days before fighting them, with instructions that if they did not accept Islam, Khālīd bin al-Walīd should then fight the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b. As soon as he reached Najrān, Khālīd bin al-Walīd began sending out his men in all directions, calling the people of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b to Islam. They accepted the call to Islam, so Khālīd bin al-Walīd and his men engaged in teaching the new Muslims the Qur’an, the Sunnah and religious practices (Ibn-Sa‘ad, n.d., Ibn-Hishām, 1955, al-Ṭabarī, 1987, al-Balādhurī, 1996).

The previous accounts show that the policy of the Prophet Muḥammad toward the polytheists of Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b was significantly different from his policy towards the Christian community. It is clear that there were only two options given to those polytheists: accept Islam or war. This policy was probably due to the divine command in Sūrat at-Tawbah, which rejects the existence of polytheism in the Arabian Peninsula, as Muslim commentaries agreed (al-Qurṭubī, 1964, al-Wāhidī, 1968, Muqātil, 1979, al-Baghawī, 1986, al-Ṭabarī, 1995, al-Bayḍāwī, 1999).

The above Muslim historians evidently agreed that the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b converted to Islam peacefully and avoided war with Khālīd bin al-Walīd’s expedition. However, significantly they did not refer to the probable reasons behind this peaceful conversion. Here, it could be argued that conversion to Islam as a true religion cannot be the only reason. There may be additional factors that contributed to persuading the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b to accept Islam. By the year known as *‘Ām al-Wuḥūd* (The Year of Delegations), 9 AH / 630 CE, Najrān had become surrounded by lands under Muslim rule, and even its Christian community had submitted to Muslim rule. As a result, the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b may have accepted Islam because they were surrounded by Muslim tribes and felt threatened.

In the second part of the story, Khālīd bin al-Walīd came to Medina with a delegation from the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b, which was led by their most prominent chieftains, Yazīd bin ‘Abd al-

Madān bin ad-Dayyān, Qays bin al-Ḥūṣayn Dhū al-Ghuṣṣah, Yazīd bin al-Mūḥajjal, ‘Abdullah bin Qurād al-Zyādī, Shaddād bin ‘Abdullah al-Qanānī and ‘Amr bin ‘Abdullah al-Ḍababī (Ibn-Hishām, 1955, Ibn-Khayyat, 1977, al-Mas‘ūdī, 1981, al-Ṭabarī, 1987). The Prophet Muḥammad received the members of the delegation of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b and they declared their testimony of Islam and Muḥammad’s Prophethood as soon as they met him. According to Ibn-Hishām (1955), the Prophet Muḥammad blamed the delegation of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b for being late to convert to Islam. But their leader, Yazīd bin ‘Abd al-Madān bin ad-Dayyān, answered the Prophet that his people were grateful to Allah, who had guided them to Islam. The Prophet Muḥammad accepted Yazīd’s answer and there followed a discussion of the pre-Islamic history of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b. Afterwards, the Prophet Muḥammad hosted them in Medina for several months and when the delegation of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b wanted to return to Najrān, the Prophet Muḥammad gave ten ounces of gold to each member of the delegation and appointed ‘Amr bin Ḥazm as their teacher and governor (Ibn-Sa‘ad, n.d., Ibn-Hishām, 1955). In addition, Ibn-Sa‘ad (n.d.) related that the Prophet Muḥammad offered written covenants to the chieftain of each Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b clan, which protected their people and property in return for a commitment to practise Islam and pay *Zakāh* (see Appendix 1).

It is significant that the Prophet Muḥammad blamed the delegation of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b. The reason for this has caused disagreement between modern researchers. al-Ḥadīthī (1986) sees the purpose of showing the Prophet Muḥammad’s annoyance toward the delegation of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b tribe as being to break their alliance with the Christian community of Najrān, which formed a military threat to Muslim influence in South Arabia. In contrast, al-Shujā‘ (1987) supposes that the Prophet Muḥammad may have wanted to examine the credibility of their faith, because the delegation of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b seemed to be arrogant, as can be observed by their expensive clothes. al-Masrī (1992) and Ibn-Jrais (2004) argue the credibility of this specific statement concerning the Prophet’s blaming of the delegation of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b, because the Prophet tended to be kind, polite and modest in such situations. Dalāl (1995) assumes that the Prophet Muḥammad blamed the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b simply because of their delay in accepting Islam, unlike other Arab tribes.

There seems to be an incomplete understanding of the Prophet’s attitude by these researchers. As the Muslim sources report, the full context of the relationship between Islam and the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b shows that they were not positive toward the early call to Islam in the Ḥajj, or later after the conquest of Mecca when they offered protection to the two Quryashī poets as detailed earlier

(section 6.2). Furthermore, the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Kaʿb continued to ignore the fact that the Muslim influence had reached South Arabia, including Najrān, and there were Muslim tribes in areas surrounding the districts of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Kaʿb. As a result, the Prophet Muḥammad probably expressed his annoyance at the delegation from the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Kaʿb and blamed them for being late to accept Islam.

Overall, it is clear that the polytheists of Banū al-Ḥārith bin Kaʿb tribe converted to Islam within a short period and became part of Muslim society. This conversion resulted in a major change in the religious structure of the region, representing the decline of polytheism and establishing Islam as a major part of the multi-religious society in the region. Moreover, the coming of a delegation from the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Kaʿb tribe meant practically complete domination of the Muslim state over the entire Najrān region, which would lead to major changes in the religious structure of the region later.

### **6.3.3 Other religious minorities (Jews and Zoroastrians)**

Jews and Zoroastrians existed in Najrān as minor religious communities, in comparison to the two main religious groups, the Christian community and the polytheists of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Kaʿb. The conditions of both communities changed considerably under Muslim rule. As detailed in Chapter Four, Ibn-Jaʿfar (1981) and al-Balādhurī (1987) narrated that the Jewish community submitted to Muslim rule and were offered regulations protecting their internal affairs, as with the Christian community (al-Balādhurī, 1987, Ibn-Jaʿfar, 1981).

But with regard to the Zoroastrians of Najrān, Muslim sources cannot provide useful details of how the Muslim authorities dealt with their existence. However, the Prophet's policy toward Zoroastrian communities in South Arabia provides a context for his policy toward their co-religionists in Najrān. Early Muslim historians such as Ibn-Saʿad (n.d.), Ibn-Hishām (1955), Ibn-Khayyat (1977) and al-Ṭabarī (1987) agreed that the Persian governor of Yemen, Bādhān ibn Sāsān, accepted the Prophet's invitation to Islam and became loyal to Muslim rule, and hence most Persian communities in South Arabia converted to Islam. For those who remained Zoroastrians, a statement given by al-Balādhurī (1987) relates that the Prophet Muḥammad required *Jizyah* from the Zoroastrians of Yemen, as he did from Christians and Jews. The Prophet adopted the same policy toward other Zoroastrian communities in other Arabian regions, particularly in Yamāmah, ʿUmān and al-Baḥrayn in the east of Arabia (Ibn-Saʿad, n.d., Abū-Yūsuf, 1962, Ibn-Sallām, 1975, Ibn-

Zanjawayh, 2006). This provides strong evidence to suggest that the Prophet adopted the same policy towards the Zoroastrians of Najrān.

However, several sources, such as al-Mizzī (1980b), Ibn-Khayyāṭ (1993) and al-Hamdānī (2004a), refer to the conversion of the Zoroastrian family of Banū al-Baylāmnī in Najrān to Islam. This means that a significant number of Najrān Zoroastrians converted to Islam, like their co-religionists in South Arabia. They were probably impacted by the conversion to Islam of the Persian governor, Bādhān ibn Sāsān, and his Persian Zoroastrian followers, in addition to the conversion of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Kaʿb tribe.

#### **6.4 Conversion policy**

The second step after dominating Najrān and converting a number of its occupants was to establish a real Muslim community as a part of the religious structure of the region. This establishment could not have happened without the adoption of an effective policy which was represented in teaching the new Muslim converts the practices and instructions of Islam. In this regard, Muslim sources offer significant details of how the central government of the Muslim state in Medina adopted several methods for teaching the new religion to Najrānites, especially amongst the ex-polytheists of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Kaʿb. This can be discussed in the light of three steps adopted by the Prophet Muḥammad and his envoys to Najrān: sending missions, building mosques and supporting the scholarly trips.

##### **6.4.1 Missions**

Muslim sources provide details of several missions dispatched by the Prophet Muḥammad to Najrān with a number of purposes and tasks. These missions played an important role in inviting people to the new religion and instructing them in Islam and its rituals of worship, in addition to their political and administrative responsibilities.

In the story of the delegation of Najrān Christians to Medina, Muslim sources indicate that a few Christians, such as Kūz bin ʿAlqama and Bashīr bin Muʿāwiyah, converted to Islam (Ibn-Mākūlā, 1990, Ibn al-Athīr, 1997, Ibn-Ḥajar, 2010). This means those new Muslims needed to be taught the new religion and understand how to worship. In this respect, early *Ḥadīth* works such as those by Ibn-Ḥanbal (1969), al-Bukhārī (1997) and Muslim (2007) recounted that the delegation of Christians from Najrān asked the Prophet Muḥammad to send a trustworthy man to instruct them in



Islam and to collect the *Jizyah* from the Christians of Najrān. Abū ‘Ubaydah ‘Āmir ibn al-Jarāḥ<sup>72</sup> was appointed as an envoy to perform both tasks. This was probably the first Muslim mission to Najrān, because it was specifically sent to the Christian community, who were the first Najrānite delegation to Medina in 9 AH / 630 CE. However, the impact of the mission of Abū ‘Ubaydah ‘Āmir ibn al-Jarāḥ in spreading Islam in Najrān appears to have been minor, because most Christians retained their faith, except for a small number who most likely attended sessions by Abū ‘Ubaydah on the Prophet’s instructions.

The second mission was the one commanded by Khālīd bin al-Walīd to the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b tribe, as previously discussed. According to al-Ṭabarī (1987), most members of Khālīd bin al-Walīd’s mission were jurists and scholars of the Qur’an, such as al-Barā’ bin ‘Āzib, Burayda bin al-Ḥuṣayb al-Aslamī and Bilāl bin Ḥārith al-Muzanī.

It is significant that, although the mission of Khālīd bin al-Walīd was initially dispatched to conquer Najrān and perhaps other southern Arabian regions, it spent around six months in Najrān teaching the new converts the main aspects of religion, such as the five pillars of Islam (*Arkān al-Islām*), rites of prayers, rules of Ḥajj, guidelines of fasting and so on (Ibn-Sa‘ad, n.d., Ibn-Hishām, 1955, al-Ṭabarī, 1987, al-Balādhurī, 1996). This all gives further credence to the educational role which the mission fulfilled. In conclusion, the mission of Khālīd bin al-Walīd resulted in the decline of polytheism in the religious structure of Najrān. The mission appears to have achieved its main task in establishing Islam as a major religion in Najrān by converting the majority of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b to Islam.

The mission of Khālīd bin al-Walīd was supported by another expedition in the same year, led by ‘Alī bin Abī Ṭālib, with a number of the Prophet Muḥammad’s companions. Although the main task of this mission was to collect *Zakāh*, the available Muslim sources refer to it as replacing the members of Khālīd bin al-Walīd’s mission with new members (Ibn-Hishām, 1955, Ibn-Khayyat, 1977, al-Ṭabarī, 1987). It seems that ‘Alī bin Abī Ṭālib’s mission played a significant role in teaching Muslim practices to the Najrānites, in addition to its financial task. This role can be seen in the engagement of a number of the members of this mission in the process of spreading Muslim

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72 He was one of the Prophet Muḥammad’s companions and one of the commanders of the Muslim armies that conquered Syria in the reign of Caliph ‘Umar bin al-Khaṭṭāb. Abū ‘Ubaydah died in Palestine in 20 AH / 639 CE (Ibn-Sa‘ad, n.d., Ibn-al-Athīr, 1994, al-Balādhurī, 1996).

practices among the new Najrānite Muslims. In addition, ‘Alī bin Abī Ṭālib’s mission apparently reflected the keenness of the Muslim authority to continue to teach people about Islam.

The fourth mission was headed by ‘Amr bin Ḥazm, who became possibly the first resident governor of Najrān in 631 CE / 10 AH (Ibn-Sa‘ad, n.d., Ibn-Hishām, 1955, al-Ṭabarī, 1987). The Prophet Muḥammad wrote an official decree, which contains valuable details regarding the policy of teaching the practices of worship that are recorded in Qur’anic verses. The decree refers to teaching the customs and the duties of the Ḥajj and the *‘U rah* (the lesser Ḥajj). There is also a statement concerning the learning of the rules of ablution, times of daily prayers and the regulations for paying *Zakāh* (Abū-Yūsuf, 1962).

The conduct of teaching all the above rituals of worship probably required the presentation of practices rather than oral explanation, in particular concerning the rites of Ḥajj and prayer. This may have involved establishing a scholarship trips, in order to learn the rituals and rules of Islam as a new religion, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

In Najrān, ‘Amr bin Ḥazm remained to teach the people Islam and rituals of worship as part of his responsibilities, until the death of the Prophet Muḥammad (Ibn-Ḥibbān, 1997). Shortly before the death of the Prophet, a false prophet called al-Aswad al-‘Ansī proclaimed himself a prophet, commanded his followers to go to Najrān and invited some tribal chieftains to support his movement (al-Ṭabarī, 1987). This impacted on the educational role of ‘Amr bin Ḥazm, who turned his attention to political and military efforts to counter the threat from al-Aswad al-‘Ansī. Although al-Aswad al-‘Ansī attacked Najrān with the help of some Najrānite rebels who joined his movement, he could not occupy Najrān. The main chieftain of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b, ‘Abdullah bin ‘Abd al-Madān bin ad-Dayyān, persuaded most Najrānites to remain Muslim and join ‘Amr bin Ḥazm (Tārīkh al-Yemen fī al-Kaw ā’in wa al-Fitan, n.d., al-Ṭabarī, 1987).

Although it faced a serious challenge from the rebellion of al-Aswad al-‘Ansī and his attempt to seize Najrān, the mission of ‘Amr bin Ḥazm was probably successful, as can be shown by the willingness of most Najrānites to fight for Islam against al-Aswad al-‘Ansī’s rebellion. Most of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b tribe still retained their Muslim faith and remained loyal to the Muslim authority, unlike some southern Arabian peoples who left Islam and went back to their old religions during the *Riddah* Wars. The arrival of al-Aswad al-‘Ansī’s movement in Najrān resulted in a failed attempt to change the religious structure in the region by imposing a new faith.

Muslim sources furnish few details for other missions that were appointed for judicial, administrative and financial purposes. One of these was headed by Abū Sufyān ibn Ḥarb<sup>73</sup>, who was responsible in particular for instructing people in prayer and collecting *Zakāh* (al-Dāraquṭnī, 1980, Ibn ‘Abd-Rabbih, 1965). There was also Rāshid bin ‘Abdrabuh al-Sulamī,<sup>74</sup> who was appointed to control the affairs of the judiciary in Najrān (Ibn ‘Abd-Rabbih, 1965, Ibn-Ḥajar, 2010). Another mission to Najrān in the time of the Prophet Muḥammad was headed by al-Mūghīrah ibn Shu‘bah.<sup>75</sup> The available Muslim sources do not provide details for this mission, except an indication that he engaged in dialogue with some Najrānite Christians (Ibn-Ḥanbal, 1969, al-Bukhārī, 1997, al-Tirmidhī, 1998, Muslim, 2007). Although these missions were sent to Najrān for non-educational tasks, their role in spreading Islam was possibly due to the introduction of Muslim rules of justice, taxation and so on.

It seems, therefore, that considerable attention was paid by the Prophet Muḥammad to Najrān, in order to spread Islam there. This attention required an effective policy that was represented by educational missions not only to call people to accept Islam, but also to learn the details of the rituals of worship. It is noticeable that the two missions of ‘Amr bin Ḥazm and Khālīd bin al-Walīd appear to have had the most impact in spreading Islam among the people of Najrān. This impact is suggested in establishing Islam as a major religion in the religion structure of Najrān can be assumed by the conversion of most of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b to Islam within a short period. This means that a major change of the religion structure of the region occurred when polytheism declined and Christianity and Judaism begin to recede, as will be debated later.

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73 His actual name was Ṣakhr ibn Ḥarb, but his nickname was Abū Sufyān, and he was one of the most famous leaders of the Quraysh tribe and a well-known trader in Mecca. He converted to Islam when conquering Mecca in 8 AH / 630 CE and died in 30 AH / 650 CE (Ibn-Sa‘ad, n.d, Ibn-al-Athīr, 1994, al-Balādhurī, 1996).

74 Rāshid bin ‘Abdrabuh al-Sulamī was one of the Prophet Muḥammad’s companions. His old name was Ghāwī bin ‘Abd al-‘Uzzā, but when he converted to Islam, the Prophet changed his name to Rāshid bin Abdrabūh (Ibn-Sa‘ad, n.d, Ibn-Ḥajar, 2010).

75 Al-Mughīrah ibn Shu‘bah Thaqaṭī was one of the Prophet Muḥammad’s companions, born in the town of al-Taif. He converted to Islam around 627 CE, was the governor of al-Kūfā in Mesopotamia in the time of Caliph Ūmar and the early Umayyad Caliphate, and died around 670 CE (Ibn-Sa‘ad, n.d, Ibn-al-Athīr, 1994, al-Balādhurī, 1996).

#### 6.4.2 Building mosques and *Katātīb*

The Muslim authorities were aware of the importance of allocating places to spread Islam and instruct new converts. Therefore, the construction of a mosque in Najrān during the early Islamic period can be considered one effective way that Islam was spread and taught in the region of Najrān. It is important to remember that Muslim societies had not yet established regular schools during the early Islamic era, so mosques were the main centres for teaching all aspects of religious studies. Therefore, it can be assumed that the Prophet Muḥammad and his governors paid specific attention to building mosques throughout the region's towns and villages, due to their role in propagating Islam among the Najrānite people. As a general statement, Ibn-Ḥazm (1996) said that: "there were mosques in every town, village and Bedouin areas that Islam had reached by the time of Prophet Muḥammad's death. In these mosques, converts learned the Qur'an and wrote out its verses, prayed and studied the Sunnah" (Vlo.2, p 213)<sup>76</sup>. This general statement is strongly in agreement with the adopted policy of building mosques across the Najrān region during the period under study, as will be discussed below.

What was probably the first mosque in Najrān was constructed by Khālīd bin al-Walīd during his stay in Najrān in 10 AH / 631 CE. Little is known about this mosque, although al-Hamdānī (1989) referred to it as the Khālīd bin al-Walīd mosque, in light of his account of the route of Ḥajj. The present author visited this mosque in the 'Ākfah site, which is situated around 80 km north of the city centre of Najrān, at an old archaeological site near Bedouin areas. There is an inscription written in Kufic script on the wall of the niche (*Mihrāb*) of this mosque, which probably dates back to seventh century CE.

The construction of the Khālīd bin al-Walīd mosque in this Bedouin area probably refers to the first physical presence of Islam in the region. It was clearly founded to propagate Islam amongst the polytheists of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka'b tribe during the period under study.

In the Rashidun Caliphate era (11-40 AH / 632-661 CE), there seems to have been an expansion in the construction of mosques in the region, possibly due to the increasing number of new converts to Islam and the stability of political and social conditions in the region. Ibn Abī-Shaybah (1989) related that Caliph 'Umar bin al-Khaṭṭāb ordered his governor in Najrān to convert an old abbey located in the town centre into a new mosque. Similarly, al-Bakrī (1983) referred to the mosque of

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<sup>76</sup> Transl. the researcher.

al-Ukhdūd, which was built on Caliph ‘Umar bin al-Khaṭṭāb’s orders. This mosque, according to al-Rāzī (1989) and al-Hamdānī (2004a), later became one of the most important centres of scholarship in South Arabia in early Muslim times, especially for holding lessons and seminars for students who were interested in religious studies.

It is noticeable that during the Rashidun Caliphate mosques were established in the city centre and rural areas where most Christians and Jews existed. The aim of this policy may have been to spread Islam through those non-Muslims by building mosques and allocating them as places for teaching Islam. This policy, over the course of time, perhaps led to changes being made in the religious structure of these town centre and rural places as a result of new converts being gained for Islam.

Towards the end of his life, Caliph ‘Umar bin al-Khaṭṭāb established additional places of learning, named *Katātīb* (plural of *Kūttab*), which can be described as a form of primary school. Muslim sources such as Ibn-Saḥnūn (1972), Ibn-‘Asākir (1987), and Ibn-Ḥajar (2010) state that these *Katātīb* were allocated for the use of young people only (children and youths) to teach the skills of reading and writing. Caliph ‘Umar bin al-Khaṭṭāb set times to study, appointed special teachers for these *Katātīb* and gave them salaries. Despite these details, it is not known whether *Katātīb* existed in the area under study or not; however, the existence of *Katātīb* in Najrān was possible because the establishment of *Katātīb* was adopted as a general policy in most regions of the Muslim state, not only in specific areas.

The few details reported above offer strong evidence to assume that the construction of mosques, and later *Katātīb*, in Najrān was a basic requirement for creating an actual Muslim community. The mosque there was not only a place of worship, but also a centre of establishing a Muslim community wherever it was founded, by making it a place for calling for Islam and then teaching all branches of religious studies.

In general, the previous information seems to agree with Ibn-Ḥazm’s assumption in terms of building mosques wherever Muslim groups could be found, whether in the town centre or in Bedouin areas. This assumption agrees with the statement that there was an additional role of mosques in Najrān as centres of schooling to teach the Qur’an, *Ḥadīth* and other branches of religious studies. Moreover, the establishment of *Katātīb* may be another supporting factor for the existence of an allocated place to teach people additional skills in reading and writing.

### 6.4.3 Scholarly trips

The establishment of scholarly trips can be considered a direct consequence of the propagation of Islam in the region of Najrān. It built up an aspiration among Najrānite people to travel to the main Muslim centres of religious learning and engage in scholarly activities there. This can be seen throughout Muslim biographies, which provide lists of Najrānite narrators of *Ḥadīth*, scholars and other characters who contributed to the scholarly trips during the time under study. The roles of missions and mosques in preaching and teaching Islam to new converts have already been discussed. Here, the discussion will focus on the scholarly trips of Najrānites themselves to learn religious studies.

The study of the Qur'an and its *Tafsīr*, *Ḥadīth*, *ʿAqīdah* and *Fiqh* were the most important fields of religious studies given attention by the Najrānite people. The best way to learn these fields was to learn from the Prophet's companions. Therefore, many Najrānites travelled to great Muslim cities where scholarly centres existed, such as Mecca and Medina. According to Ibn-Mandah (1996) and Ibn-Qānī' (1998), Bashīr al-Ka'bī al-Ḥārithī can be considered the first Najrānite Muslim who travelled to Medina and met the Prophet Muḥammad, before the arrival of the delegation of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka'b. Shortly afterwards, their delegation reached Medina; the long stay of the members of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka'b delegation, which lasted around four months, can be regarded as the model for a scholarly trip. Early Muslim sources such Ibn-Sa'ad (n.d.), Ibn-Hishām (1955) and al-Ṭabarī (1987) agree that most of those members attended seminars and sessions on Qur'anic studies, *Ḥadīth*, *ʿAqīdah* and *Fiqh*. As evidence, Muslim biographies provide details for Najrānite narrators of *Ḥadīth* who accompanied the delegation of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka'b, such as Abduh bin Mushīr, al-Shamrdul bin Gabbāth al-Ka'bī and Hānī' bin Yazīd (Ibn-Sa'ad, n.d., Ibn-Mandah, 1996, Ibn al-Athīr, 1997). These provide evidence to assume that the purpose of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka'b delegation was not only to declare their faith to the Prophet Muḥammad, but also involved learning about the fields of religious studies.

The delegation of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka'b was not the only trip of its kind during the life of the Prophet Muḥammad. Ibn-Ḥibbān (1973), Ibn al-Athīr (1997) and Ibn-Ḥajar (2010) spoke of Jamīl al-Najrānī, who met the Prophet Muḥammad and narrated some of his *Ḥadīths* (Ibn-Sa'ad, n.d., Ibn-Mandah, 1996, Ibn al-Athīr, 1997). This short statement potentially means that scholarly trips had become a common activity among Najrānites in order to study religion. The scholarly trips in the

Prophetic time most likely sought to support the Muslim community in the Najrān region by preparing Najrānite scholars either to preach for Islam or to teach its instructions.

In the era of the Rashidun Caliphate, particularly the reign of the second Caliph, ‘Umar bin al-Khaṭṭāb, scholarly trips to study religion flourished during this period. For example, Abdulrḥmān bin al-Baylamānī was one of the Najrānite narrators of *Ḥadīth* and travelled to Mecca, Medina, Damascus and al-Fūṣṭāṭ<sup>77</sup> to learn about religion from companions such as ‘Abdullah bin ‘Umar, ‘Abdullah bin ‘Amr and ‘Abdullah bin al-‘Abbās (Ibn-Sa‘ad, n.d., al-Bukhārī, 1941, Ibn-Khayyāt, 1993). Another example is Shuryaḥ bin Hānī’ al-Ḥārithī, who attended seminars and lessons held by Abū Hurayrah al-Dawsī at the Holy Mosque of Medina. Moreover, Ibn al-Athīr (1997) and Ibn-Ḥajar (2010) refer to al-Ṭufail bin Zaid al-Ḥārithī, who came to Medina in the reign of Caliph ‘Umar bin al-Khaṭṭāb in spite of his age; it was claimed that he was 100 years old. In addition, probably in the latter part of the reign of Caliph ‘Umar bin al-Khaṭṭāb, Muslim biographies provide details for other Najrānite people, such as al-Rabī‘ bin Ziyād, Kathīr bin Shihāb bin al-Ḥūṣain and Shuryaḥ bin Hānī’ al-Ḥārithī (Ibn-Sa‘ad, n.d., al-Bukhārī, 1941, Ibn-Ḥibbān, 1973, al-‘Ijlī, 1984). They learnt from the Prophet’s companions, such as Anas ibn Mālīk, ‘Ā’ishah bint Abī Bakr, ‘Alī bin Abī Ṭālib and Abū Hurayrah al-Dawsī. Later, some of these Najrānites joined the Muslim armies of conquest and some of them were appointed as commanders and governors of the conquered countries while others returned to Najrān.

It is evident that there was a growth in the number of Najrānites travelling to those Muslim cities where scholars of religion lived. Significantly, it seems that the scholarly trips were not only to the region of al-Ḥijāz, mainly to Mecca and Medina; they extended to other destinations outside the Arabian Peninsula, including Mesopotamia, Syria and Egypt, as can be seen in the case of Abdulrḥmān bin al-Baylamānī. More importantly, the above details present a clear image of the essential role played by scholarly trips in motivating the scholarly movement in Najrān itself, by qualifying a number of Najrānite people as scholars, jurists and teachers of religion. This raises the significant question of whether or not the development of these scholarly trips led to the establishment of a new generation scholars in religious studies in Najrān itself.

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77 Al-Fūṣṭāṭ was a city founded by the Muslim commander ‘Amr ibn al-‘Ās which became the capital of Egypt in early Islamic history. Despite the fact that it lost its political importance after the building of Cairo, al-Fūṣṭāṭ remained an economic centre until its decline in the Mamlūk period (Jomier, 2016).

Muslim sources furnish some details for a number of Najrānite scholars who appeared in the latter part of the Rashidun Caliphate era, such as ‘Iṣām bin Bashīr, Muḥammad bin Abduḥmān bin al-Baylamānī, ‘Abdullah bin al-Ḥārith al-Najrānī and Bishr bin Rāfi‘ al-Najrānī (al-Bukhārī, 1941, Ibn-Ḥibbān, 1973, al-Mizzī, 1980a, al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, 1997). An excellent example can be seen in the case of Bishr bin Rāfi‘ al-Najrānī, who lived until the time of the Umayyad Caliphate. According to al-Bukhārī (1941), Ibn Abī-Ḥātim (1973), Ibn-Ḥibbān (1973), al-Mizzī (1980a) and Ibn-Ḥajar (2010), this man was described as the imam and scholar of Najrān.

These details confirm that a generation of Najrānite scholars was established in the latter part of the Rashidun Caliphate era. This generation was a natural result of the development of the scholarly movement in the Najrān region. It can also be supposed that the establishment of this generation may have led to the active pursuit of religious studies in this region due to the presence of Najrānite scholars living in the region; they also most likely held sessions in the Qur’an, *Ḥadīth*, *‘Aqīdah* and *Fiqh*.

In summary, scholarly trips from Najrān to Muslim centres of religious studies clearly flourished, as can be seen from the journeys of a significant number of Najrānites to these centres. This probably played an important role in establishing scholars in the region and perhaps in further popularising scholarly activities among the people of the region.

## **6.5 Ruling policy towards non-Muslims**

The policy of the Prophet Muḥammad and his Caliphs toward non-Muslims in Najrān, especially Jews and Christians, is given significant attention in modern Western research. For Lewis (1984), Cohen (1994) and Goddard (2000), the Muslim policy towards Christians and Jews in that early time was generally tolerant. However, these authors note that this tolerance was conditional and involved acceptance that Jews and Christians were required to pay *Jizyah*. In other words, Lewis (1984) and Cohen (1994) suggest that the dealings of the Muslim government with Jews and Christians were based on the standard laws of Muslim jurisprudence, which regulated the relationships between Muslims and the Christian-Jewish category of *Ahl al-Dhimma* (Protected People) or *Ahl al-Kitāb* (People of the Book). These standard laws allowed a measure of tolerance towards both Jews and Christians, as seen in their freedom to worship, communal autonomy in most civil matters and the enjoyment of citizenship rights. However, both Lewis (1984) and Cohen (1994) also note that Muslim laws considered Najrānite non-Muslims as second class citizens.



In the case of Najrān, the Muslim policy towards non-Muslims dealt with essential issues concerning the practice of religion, security, the economy and citizenship. Here, the *Jizyah* was a central matter in determining the relationship between the Muslim authorities and non-Muslims of the region. The author would argue that there still appears to be an incomplete understanding of the concept of *Jizyah* amongst the Western views mentioned above. *Jizyah* can be considered as a necessary financial obligation in order to enjoy the rights of citizenship and protection under Muslim rule, rather than being an additional or distinguishing requirement. This can be understood when examining the rights and duties of citizenship in view of the Muslim policy at that time, as detailed through the following documents

### **6.5.1 Policy documents**

Muslim sources report three main documents by the Prophet Muḥammad: two covenants to the Christian community and one official decree that set out the political position of non-Muslims in Najrān. There is some disagreement over the two Prophetic covenants to the Christians of Najrān as to which version of both covenants can be believed. Though scholars such as Scher (1907), Hamidullah (1956), Watt (1956) and al-Ḥiwālī (1976) accepted the Muslim version, a very recent study conducted by El-Wakil (2016), doubts the authenticity of the Muslim version, claiming that the Christian version offered by *The Chronicle of Seert* (Scher, 1907) seems to be the original version of both covenants.

El-Wakil's claim seems to lack certain key factors. In one of them, the first covenant claims a supportive role of Christians with the Prophet Muḥammad in his conflict with the polytheists of Quraysh and the Jews of Medina, which is certainly unrecorded through Muslim sources. Second, the text of this covenant does not speak of terms of peace held between the two sides. It is just the second covenant, which talks in detail of the offering of rights to Christians of Najrān rather than only making demands on them, which mainly differs from the Muslim version, as will be debated later. Thirdly, the list of witnesses shows problematic issues such as that of Ja'far bin Abī Ṭālib, who was martyred a year before the Prophet-Christians meeting, in the Battle of Mū'tah in 8 AH / 627 CE (Ibn-Sa'ad, n.d., Ibn-Hishām, 1955, al-Ṭabarī, 1987). This list also mentions three Companions, Abū al-Ghaliyah, 'Abdullah bin Ḥafa and 'Abdullah bin Sa'ad bin 'Ubādah, who are not identified through available biographical sources. Fourth, in the Muslim version particularly, the Prophet's language style using in writing such documents does not differ from his letters,

treaties and covenants with other groups at the same time. As evidence, the three physical fragments of the Prophet's letters to al-Munthir Ibn Sawā al-Tamimī (the ruler of al-Baḥrayn region in the East of Arabian Peninsula) and al-Muqaūqas (who was most likely Cyrus of Alexandria, the Byzantine ruler of Egypt), and to Negus, king of Abyssinia, are similar in terms of the language style, the tone of beginning the letters and the brevity of the words and expressions used (Hamidullah, 1956) .

Fifth, it should be pointed out that El-Wakil's argument focuses on the assumption that the transmission of the original text of the two covenants by Muslim scholars is perhaps unreliable, instead of examining the impact of the terms of the two covenants on the times that followed. For example, Abū-bakr al-Ṣiddīq renewed the first covenant with the Christians of Najrān using the same terms. The impact of these terms, referring to the matter of expelling Jews and Christians, also appears again in the reign of the second Caliph, 'Umar bin al-Khaṭṭāb, and will be debated later. All the above factors provide strong evidence for adopting the Muslim version of the two Prophetic covenants in the current research, instead of *The Chronicle of Seert* accounts.

The first covenant, which was drawn up for the delegation of the Christians of Najrān, throws light on the major features of the Prophet Muḥammad's policy. It states that those Christians had to be subject to the Prophet Muḥammad's rule and had to pay 2,000 suits of garments, where each suit would equal one ounce. The Christians of Najrān were also required to host the Prophet's envoys for up to one month, and had to "lend 30 coats of mail, 30 horses, and 30 camels if there is war in Yemen" (Ibn-Sa'ad, n.d., Vol. 1, p287, Abū-Yūsuf, 1962, p84, Ibn-Sallām, 1975, p244, al-Balādhurī, 1987, p72, Ibn-Zanjawayh, 2006, Vol. p2, 72). In return, non-Muslim Najrānites would be offered full protection of their person, property and religion. Additionally, the Prophet stated that the people of Najrān would not be asked to pay any other type of tax that might have been required in pre-Islamic times (Ibn-Sa'ad, n.d., Abū-Yūsuf, 1962, Ibn-Sallām, 1975). However, the covenant also states that the practice of usury was prohibited and the Prophet Muḥammad would not be responsible for any person practising it (Ibn-Hishām, 1955).

The second covenant was made by the Prophet Muḥammad with the bishop Abū al-Ḥārith bin 'Alqama and the clergy of Najrān (Ibn-Sa'ad, n.d., al-Bayhaqī, 1988). It does not contain major differences from the first one; its text simply asserts the protection of the religious autonomy of the Christian community "as long as they are loyal and perform their obligations well they not being burdened by wrong and not doing wrong". (Transl. Watt, 1956, p 359). This covenant seems to be a confirmation of the clauses of the first covenant, as suggested before (see sub-section 6.3.1).

The third document is an official decree, given by the Prophet Muḥammad to the first resident governor in Najrān, ‘Amr bin Ḥazm, in 10 AH / 631 CE (Ibn-Hishām, 1955, Ibn-Khaldūn, 1984, al-Ṭabarī, 1987). This decree states that the Jews and Christians of Najrān were required to pay no more than a dinar per year (or the equivalent in garments) per adult as *Jizyah* in return for the protection of their freedom of religion and the provision of security.

These three documents paint a clear picture of the Prophet Muḥammad’s policy towards the non-Muslims of Najrān, beginning with the Christians and later including the Jews and most likely the Zoroastrian minority, as explained earlier (sub-section 6.3.3). According to these documents, non-Muslims were fully subject to Muslim rule and did not have any political role except for being accepted as part of Najrānite society. In return, it is clear that the Prophet adopted a fixed policy to regulate the relationship between the Muslim authorities and non-Muslims that became standard during the period following the Prophet’s death. This policy dealt with three main issues: religion, economy and security, as will be examined next.

### **6.5.2 Religious policy**

The right to practise one’s religion was an essential issue in the relationship between the Muslim authorities and the non-Muslims of Najrān. The three Prophetic documents provide explicit details of how the Prophet Muḥammad arranged this issue in codified rules. The Muslim authority adopted a clear policy in regulating the religious affairs of Najrānite non-Muslims in three main areas: freedom of worship, the status of church clergy and the safety of places of worship. In terms of the first one, the Prophet’s decree includes an important clause which stipulates that Jews and Christians will not be forced to convert to Islam (Tārīkh al-Yemen fī al-Kaw ā’in wa al-Fitan, n.d., Ibn-Hishām, 1955, al-Ṭabarī, 1987). This implies that the given freedom of religion most likely included rituals of worship, religious celebrations, theological issues and other matters concerning worship. The direct reference to protect the monasticism furnishes additional evidence for this suggestion when the first covenant states that it is not permitted for a monk to be removed from his monastic way of life, as discussed in Chapter Five (See sub-section 5.6.4).

Concerning the second, with regard to places of worship, protection clearly includes all types of places of worship, wherever they are located. This protection most probably includes the staff of these places, the property belonging to these places and most of the activities and celebrations that were held inside non-Muslim places of worship.

With regard to the third area, the autonomy of the church clergy means that the consecration of the holy orders in Najrān and the administration of this clergy was an internal issue for these groups of non-Muslims. More clearly, according to these documents, the bishop or priest, for example, would not lose their spiritual authority in their community such as presiding over rituals of worship, teaching theology and arranging religious celebrations. This freedom of religion most likely included the consecration of the clergy by the highest spiritual authorities. In other words, as concluded in Chapter Five (section 5.6), the bishop of the Najrānite church appears to have been consecrated by either the Monophysitic church or the Nestorian church. Muslim law on this specific issue therefore enabled the clergy of Najrān to still have connections to wider groups of the same denomination.

In sum, the Prophet's policy evidently showed a considerable amount of tolerance towards non-Muslims in relation to their being allowed to practise their own religion, full protection of places of worship and relative autonomy for the authorities of the church clergy. This is what most likely enabled non-Muslims to enjoy their religious life in peace.

#### **6.5.4 Economic policy**

The economy of Najrān has already been given attention in Chapter Two as a contributing factor for the establishment of non-Muslims in the Najrān region (see section 2.4). Thus, it is not surprising that the Muslim authorities organised the economic activities in the Najrān region with fixed regulations. One of these was the prohibition of usury, which appears to have been one of the main financial activities, especially in Jewish and Christian communities. It might be thought that this prohibition would have had a negative impact on banking activities, because it prohibited the charging of interest on loans. However, it is important to remember that the practice of usury was also prohibited for Muslims. In other words, everyone in Najrānite society, both Muslim and non-Muslim, was required to cease practising this financial activity. This meant that a major source of wealth for Christian and Jewish traders in particular was stopped in accordance with the rules of the Muslim government. This led to serious consequence concerning the existence of both the Jewish and Christian communities, as will be detailed later.

However, the Muslim authorities offered the full protection of non-Muslims' property, including economic activities such as trade, agriculture, industry and so on. This regulation therefore enabled the non-Muslims of Najrān to practise these economic activities in safety.

The Prophetic documents give attention to the reform of the taxation system for non-Muslims. This reform consisted of cancelling all types of tax that non-Muslims might have been required to pay in pre-Islamic times (Ibn-Sa‘ad, n.d., Abū-Yūsuf, 1962, Ibn-Sallām, 1975). This short statement allows us to assume that Najrānite Christians and Jews paid a number of different types of tax before the coming of Islam. The available sources do not provide useful details concerning the identity of the collectors or the purposes of those taxes – whether they were religious, economic or political. There is only one statement which refers to paying tax to the chieftain of the Kinda tribe, al-Ash‘ath ibn Qays<sup>78</sup> by the Christians of Najrān which was cancelled at the coming of Islam (Ibn al-Athīr, 1979, Ibn-Manzūr, 1994). But there could have been types of tax collected by the leaders of the community as a value of their positions or roles. This can be suggested by the role of the al-Sayyid, who was described as the leader responsible for the financial and administrative arrangements of the Christian community.

The regulation of *Jizyah* developed a system of estimation. It began with requiring Christians and Jews to pay 2,000 suits of clothing, where each suit equalled one ounce, as explained earlier. However, ‘Amr bin Ḥazm’s decree contains a Prophetic order to collect one dinar per adult, whether male or female, or an equal value in clothes, every year. This difference seems to be a fixed estimation rather than a major change in the Prophet’s policy toward non-Muslim Najrānites, because the available Christian and Muslim sources do not record any protests made by Najrānite non-Muslims about this change during the Prophet’s lifetime.

In addition, the payment of *Jizyah* includes exceptions based on age and ability. According to Muslim scholars such as Abū-Yūsuf (1962), al-Ṭabarī (1987), Ibn Abī-Shaybah (1989), Ibn-Qayyim al-Jawzīyah (1997) and al-Māwardī (2003), children, old people, the disabled and poor people were not required to pay *Jizyah*. The decree of ‘Amr bin Ḥazm explicitly states that *Jizyah* should only be collected from male and female adults. This provides strong evidence to assume that the above-mentioned categories of people were exempted from paying *Jizyah* in Najrān.

*Zakāh* is another important issue with regard to the regulation of the taxation system in Najrān. According to the Qur’an (Sūrat at-Tawbah, verse 54) and a number of Muslim scholars, such as Abū-Yūsuf (1962), Mālik (1985), Ibn-Ḥazm (1988) and al-Shāfi‘ī (1990), non-Muslims were most

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78 Al-Ash‘ath ibn Qays al-Kindī was the leader of the Kinda tribe, converted to Islam in the time of the Prophet and later became one of Caliph ‘Alī bin Abī Ṭālib’s supporters until he died in 40 AH/ 661 CE (Ibn-Sa‘ad, n.d., Ibn-Ḥibbān, 1973, Ibn-Khayyāt, 1993, Ibn-al-Athīr, 1994, Blankinship, 2009).

likely not required to pay *Zakāh*. There are two references that are helpful in order to understand the Muslim policy on this issue in the case of the non-Muslims of Najrān. The first is the first covenant of the Prophet, which states that the people of Najrān should not be taxed “*lā Yaḥshrūn Wlā Ya’shrūn*” (Ibn-Sa‘ad, n.d., Abū-Yūsuf, 1962, Ibn-Sallām, 1975). The second is the order of the Prophet to ‘Amr bin Ḥazm to collect *Zakāh* only from “believers”, that is, Muslims (Ibn-Hishām, 1955, Ibn-Khaldūn, 1984, al-Ṭabarī, 1987). Both references are strongly in agreement with the above Muslim scholars with regard to not forcing Jews and Christians to pay *Zakāh*. Therefore, it is clear that the non-Muslims of Najrān were not required to pay *Zakāh*, unlike the Muslims, who were required to pay it to the Muslim authorities because it is one of the Five Pillars of Islam. Here, it can be suggested that *Jizyah* was a similar form of financial obligation to *Zakāh*, taking into account the differences in their estimation, purposes and the category of citizens required to pay each of these obligations.

The Muslim authorities adopted new rules to regulate the economic activities of non-Muslims, in terms of restricting banking activities by prohibiting usury, but otherwise enabling non-Muslims to continue their economic activities as before. This policy is clearly shown by the reformation of the taxation system, cancelling all pre-Islamic taxes and exempting non-Muslims from paying *Zakāh*, while in return requiring them to pay *Jizyah* as an obligatory requirement to enjoy the rights of citizenship.

#### **6.5.5 Non-Muslims of Najrān and the concept of citizenship**

The hypothesis of Lewis and Cohen and other Western scholars is consistent with the Prophet Muḥammad’s policy toward the non-Muslims of Najrān in terms of dealing with the most important issues of their existence. It defined the two main communities, Jews and Christians, and their roles under Muslim law, and accepted them as a part of the Najrānite society. As detailed previously, this policy adopted fixed rules to deal with the religious, security and economic conditions of non-Muslims under Muslim rule. However, the Western discussion on the concept of second class citizenship shows concern to argue here.

When considering the concept of citizenship from a Muslim perspective, there appeared an early concept established by the Prophet Muḥammad in the light of the term *’Ummah* (nation) in the Constitution of Medina (*Ṣaḥīfat al-Madīnah*) (Ibn-Hishām, 1955). This term dealt with the Jews of Medina in relation to their rights and obligations as citizens, regardless their religion. Hence, a

number of Muslim jurists such as Ibn-Qudāmah (1968) ,al-Shaybānī (1997) and Ibn-Qayyim al-Jawzīyah (1997) stated that those Christians, Jews and other non-Muslims who lived under the rule of the Muslim empire, had to be considered citizens belonging to the Muslim state. The three jurists agreed that non-Muslims, therefore, had the right to enjoy the basic rights of public services such as health care, education, public security and social benefit (Ibn-Qudāmah, 1968, al-Shaybānī, 1997, Ibn-Qayyim al-Jawzīyah, 1997). More clearly, other Muslim scholars such as Abū-Yūsuf (1962), Ibn-Sallām (1975) and al-Balādhurī (1987), recorded that the Prophet Muḥammad and his Caliphs paid financial aid to disabled and poor non-Muslims and provided free health care to their patients. Their basic rights included other aspects such as the freedom of movement and travel across the region of the country, and the freedom of practising economic activities (Ibn-Qudāmah, 1968, al-Shaybānī, 1997, Ibn-Qayyim al-Jawzīyah, 1997).

In return, non-Muslim citizens were required to be committed to major obligations such as the payment of *Jizyah*, respecting Muslim laws and being fully loyal to the political authority (Ibn-Qudāmah, 1968, al-Shaybānī, 1997, Ibn-Qayyim al-Jawzīyah, 1997, al-Māwardī, 2003). This all became standard policy adopted by Muslim authorities towards protected non-Muslims in the period under study (Zaydān, 1963). Such standard policy was most likely to have been applied to the non-Muslims of Najrān because they became subject to the Muslim rule.

As a result, it seems illogical to consider those non-Muslims of Najrān as second class citizens merely because they paid *Jizyah*. It is true that the Muslim authority established a special category for Christians, Jews and Zoroastrians of Najrān as non-Muslims or Protected People. This category, nevertheless, does not mean that additional financial obligations were required of those non-Muslims or they could not be offered same basic rights of security, health care and access to justice. This is unlikely because non-Muslims apparently enjoyed exemption from military service and *Zakāh* whereas the Muslims were still required to pay *Zakāh* and to provide military service. This can be concluded from the first covenant of the Prophet, which regulates the relationship between the Muslim authority and the Najrānite non-Muslims, particularly in the case of war. It states that Najrānite non-Muslims are required to offer military facilities as a loan, instead of providing military service, and then the Muslim authority will be fully responsible for the protection of Najrānite non-Muslims (see sub-section 6.5.1). *Jizyah*, therefore, would seem to have been a

financial obligation required in order to confer most rights of citizenship on non-Muslims, rather than an additional requirement.

In sum, it can be suggested that the Prophet's policy accepted non-Muslims as a part of Najrānite society by giving them basic rights of citizenship such as public services, and freedom of religion and in conducting economic activities.

#### **6.5.6 The impact of Muslim rule on religious coexistence in Najrān**

The previous section offered a clear basis to assume that the Muslim authorities adopted a fixed policy toward the non-Muslims of Najrān during the time under study. At this point, it is important to determine whether this fixed policy established peaceful coexistence in Najrānite society or not, in the light of the impact of Muslim rule on the political, security, religious and economic conditions.

Two main episodes provide a real examination of this policy. The first is the civil war known in Muslim history as the Wars of the *Riddah*. This war began with the emergence of several false prophets who claimed the Prophethood and rebelled against Muslim rule. In South Arabia, a tribal leader called al-Aswad al-ʿAnsī rebelled against Muslim authority, claimed the Prophethood and took over a large amount of land between Ṣanʿā and Najrān in the final days of the Prophet Muḥammad's life (al-Fasawī, 1981, al-Masʿūdī, 1981, al-Balādhurī, 1987, al-Ṭabarī, 1987). According to al-Ṭabarī (1987), al-Aswad al-ʿAnsī extended his dominion to include Najrān and around six hundred horsemen of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Kaʿb were his followers. At the time, the governor of Najrān, ʿAmr bin Ḥazm, wrote an urgent letter to the Prophet Muḥammad asking his advice, and the Prophet replied to ʿAmr bin Ḥazm, telling him to stay in Najrān, join the Najrānites who remained Muslims and prepare to fight al-Aswad al-ʿAnsī and his followers while the Prophet sent military support.

In addition, al-Ṭabarī (1987) referred to a letter written by the Prophet Muḥammad to the Arabs and non-Arabs who were living in Najrān. Unfortunately, al-Ṭabarī's evidence is unclear because he did not clarify the content of this letter and the identity of the non-Arabs. Nonetheless, a valuable account offered by *Tārīkh al-Yemen fī al-Kawāʿin wa al-Fitan* (n.d, p25) and repeated by Ibn-Khaldūn (1984), reports that the Prophet Muḥammad wrote a letter to the people of Najrān "either Arabs or Christians". Neither source records the details of this letter but the Prophet Muḥammad



most probably wanted to guarantee the loyalty of non-Muslim Najrānites to the Muslim rule by reminding them of previous agreements.

A short time later, Muslim sources reported that on the eve of the Prophet Muḥammad's death, al-Aswad al-ʿAnsī was killed in Ṣanʿā (Ibn-Khayyat, 1977, al-Masʿūdī, 1981, al-Balādhurī, 1987, al-Ṭabarī, 1987). Shortly after this, Caliph Abū-bakr al-Ṣiddīq dispatched two armies to South Arabia to fight the rebels there. According to al-Ṭabarī (1987), the first army was commanded by Jarīr ibn ʿAbdullah al-Bajalī,<sup>79</sup> who arrived in Najrān and found no difficulty in defeating the remaining few followers of al-Aswad al-ʿAnsī. Shortly afterwards, al-Muhājir bin abī Umayyah<sup>80</sup> led another army and joined the army of Jarīr ibn ʿAbdullah al-Bajalī in Najrān, then both armies stayed in Najrān for a period of time to arrange its affairs and return stability to the region.

It is clear that the arrival of the *Riddah* in Najrān impacted Muslim policy toward non-Muslims in terms of security and political acceptance. The above details show that the Prophet Muḥammad contacted the non-Muslims of Najrān in addition to the Muslims. The reason behind this contact was most probably to confirm their loyalty to Muslim rule. As discussed earlier, this loyalty was regulated with fixed clauses, which included full protection for those non-Muslims (sub-section 6.5.1). As mentioned above, although a number of Najrānites, in particular from the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Kaʿb, joined al-Aswad al-ʿAnsī's insurgency, the majority of Najrānites, including non-Muslims, would most likely have remained loyal to Muslim rule. In addition, the fact that two armies were dispatched by Caliph Abū-bakr al-Ṣiddīq to liberate Najrān provides evidence to suggest that the Muslim authorities took their responsibility to protect the non-Muslims of Najrān, as the Prophet had declared in his covenants, very seriously. As the above details show, the fight against the rebels in Najrān was handled by armies coming from al-Ḥijāz, not by local people.

At this time, most likely after the Wars of the *Riddah*, the Christians of Najrān dispatched a delegation to Caliph Abū-bakr al-Ṣiddīq to renew the Prophet's first covenant (Abū-Yūsuf, 1962,

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79 He was one of the Prophet's companions, who converted to Islam in 9 AH / 630 CE and later became commander of Muslim armies in Yemen in the reign of the Caliph Abū-bakr al-Ṣiddīq before participating in the conquests of Mesopotamia later. Jarīr ibn ʿAbdullah al-Bajalī settled in al-Kūfa until his death after 50 AH/ 750 CE (Ibn-Saʿad, n.d., Ibn al-Athīr, 1997, Ibn-Ḥajar, 2010).

80 Al-Muhājir bin abī Umayyah al-Qurashī was also one of the Prophet's companions and a military commander in the *Riddah* Wars in Yemen. Muslim sources provide few details of this man's life in the Caliphate era, and it is not clear when he converted to Islam or when he died (Ibn-Saʿad, n.d., Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, 1992, Ibn al-Athīr, 1997, Ibn-Ḥajar, 2010).

al-Ṭabarī, 1987). Abū-bakr al-Ṣiddīq accepted their request by drawing up another covenant, which stated that he granted the same terms of protection; in return, the Christians of Najrān were to remain loyal to the Muslim government, as the Prophet Muḥammad had stated in the first covenant.

This renewed covenant can be regarded as additional evidence to suggest that the non-Muslim communities in Najrān did not join the rebels in fighting against the Muslim authorities in the Wars of the *Riddah*. The available Muslim sources interestingly do not record any actions by Jews and Christians of Najrān that broke with the Muslim rule during the reign of Caliph Abū-bakr al-Ṣiddīq. Therefore, it is not surprising to see that this Caliph allowed non-Muslims to remain as a part of Najrānite society.

The loyalty of the non-Muslim communities to Muslim rule during the Wars of the *Riddah*, in addition to Abū-bakr's covenant of renewal, apparently enabled both communities to establish themselves as a part of Najrānite society. Hence, it is reasonable to assume that this establishment enabled them to practise different economic activities, through the protection of their property as the previous covenants stipulated. It also maintained the religious character of the region of Najrān as a multi-religious society, by guaranteeing freedom of worship for non-Muslims.

However, it is worthwhile observing that submission to Muslim rule particularly impacted on the political influence of the Christian community. It has been already concluded in Chapter Four that the Jews of Najrān had no considerable influence during the late pre-Islamic period (section 4.3), but for the Christian community, the situation was significantly different. Muslim rule deprived Christians of their military power, and hence they lost their status as local leaders during the pre-Islamic period, as explained in Chapter Two (sub-section 2.5.3). Therefore, there is little appearance of any political role of Najrānite Christians and Jews during this period in the history of the Najrān region. The available Muslim sources do not mention Najrānite non-Muslim members of the political authority of the region as rulers, commanders or even judges during the Islamic period. The Wars of the *Riddah* are a clear example for this conclusion because Christian leaders did not command armies to defend Najrān against al-Aswad al-ʿAnsī's invasion, they were only required to remain loyal to the Muslim rule.

The reign of the second Caliph, ʿUmar bin al-Khaṭṭāb, witnessed a pivotal decision that resulted in the expulsion of a significant number of Jews and Christians from Najrān in 641 CE / 20 AH.

Wellhausen (1927) and Courbage and Fargues (1997) consider this decision to be a major change in the policy of the Muslim authorities toward the non-Muslims of Najrān, breaking the Prophet's covenant. It may be argued that it is unlikely that Caliph 'Umar broke the Prophet's covenant. In other words, there was a strong reason for his decision that was based on the clauses of the Prophet's covenant.

A number of Muslim historians, such as Ibn-Sa'ad (n.d.), Ibn-Sallām (1975), al-Balādhurī (1987) and al-Ṭabarī (1987), spoke of the decision taken by Caliph 'Umar bin al-Khaṭṭāb to expel non-Muslims from Najrān and compensate them with new properties in a small town near al-Kūfa, later called Najrāniyyat al-Kūfa. These historians, however, did not come to an agreement concerning the actual reason behind the expulsion of Jews and Christians from Najrān. Abū-Yūsuf (1962), for example, supposed that Caliph 'Umar bin al-Khaṭṭāb feared an increase in the number of non-Muslims in Najrān which could form a military threat to the Muslims in the Arabian Peninsula in future. Therefore, he took his decision to evict them and move them outside the Arabian Peninsula. The historian al-Balādhurī (1987) agreed with Abū-Yūsuf in adopting the military threat as a reason behind the decision of Caliph 'Umar bin al-Khaṭṭāb. However, he cited this reason in the light of another account, that the population of Najrān had grown to around forty thousand and used to dispute among themselves. So then the Christians of Najrān came to Caliph 'Umar bin al-Khaṭṭāb asking him to evict them, and because he feared their military power, he took advantage of this request and expelled them, according to al-Balādhurī (1987). Others, such as Ibn-Sa'ad (n.d.), Ibn-Sallām (1975) and al-Balādhurī (1987) himself, suggested that the non-Muslims of Najrān were expelled because they broke a specific clause concerning the prohibition of usury.

In a slightly different statement, al-Ṭabarī (1987) narrated in detail that Caliph 'Umar bin al-Khaṭṭāb dispatched Ya'lā bin Umayyah<sup>81</sup> to Najrān and ordered him to evacuate the people of Najrān (Christians and Jews) due to the recommendations of the Prophet Muḥammad and Caliph Abū-bakr al-Ṣiddīq, who stipulated that non-Muslim religions must not remain in addition to Islam in the Arabian Peninsula.

Clearly, the above Muslim historians disagreed among themselves about the most probable reason behind 'Umar's decision. This disagreement perhaps reflects concern relating to Jewish-Christian

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81 Ya'lā bin Umayyah al-Tamimī was one of the Prophet's companions and worked as a governor in several regions in Yemen. He was one of Caliph 'Alī bin Abī Ṭālib's supporters and was killed in the battle of Ṣiffin in 37 AH / 657 CE (Ibn-Mandah, 1996, Ibn al-Athīr, 1997).

existence in Najrān, as can be seen by the suggestion that military power was a factor and that this was a divine decree from God. In addition, the claim that Najrānite non-Muslims requested to be evicted simply because they were being disruptive among themselves seems illogical because there was a local judiciary of the Muslim authority which was able to resolve such issues. The practice of usury appears to have been the most likely reason behind ‘Umar’s decision to expel the Christians and Jews from Najrān, due to two main factors. Firstly, usury flourished among Najrānites, especially those who were bankers and traders, during the pre-Islamic era until the coming of Islam, as discussed in Chapter Two (section 2.4). Secondly, the first covenant of the Prophet stipulates that the practice of usury must be prohibited. The link between the two factors is really plausible here. True, the Prophet prohibited usury but it is possible that among Christians and Jews it was perhaps not easy to end the practice of usury within a short period because it was a major economic activity. Thus, this all provides strong evidence to assume that possibly the clauses of the covenant were broken, and this was considered justification for ‘Umar’s decision.

The impact of this decision on the religious structure of the region for the remainder of the Rashidun Caliphate era is another significant issue for modern research. Researchers such as al-Ḥadīthī (1986), al-Masrī (1992), Dalāl (1995) and Ibn-Jrais (2004) have understood the impact of ‘Umar’s decision as evidence of the end of the Christian-Jewish existence in Najrān. From then on, the religious structure accordingly seems to have become overwhelmingly Muslim. However, Tobi (1999) claims that ‘Umar’s decision was only implemented in the Christian community of Najrān’s town centre, and not for those who settled in other villages and rural areas across the region of Najrān.

In fact, a Christian-Jewish presence in Najrān remained after the date of ‘Umar’s decision for many centuries, as local sources in Yemen and Eastern Christian collections agree (Duval et al., 1908, Mingana, 1926, al-‘Alawī, 1972, Ibn-Ya‘qūb, 1996, Ibn al-Mujāwir, 1996, al-Thaqafī, 2002). To account for this, there seems to be an incomplete understanding of the circumstances surrounding the implementation of ‘Umar’s decision. One of the most important clauses of the Prophet’s first covenant stipulates that the other members of the Christian and Jewish communities would not be responsible if one of them committed a transgression. Therefore, Caliph ‘Umar most probably took this particular clause into consideration, by allowing those who were not involved in practising usury to remain. In other words, the decision to expel Christians and Jews from Najrān was likely to have been implemented only for those who practised usury, not for those who had settled in rural

areas, as Tobi supposes,. As a result, some Christians and Jews apparently remained in Najrān as a part of its population.

Here, another question can be raised: about the Jewish-Christian reaction to ‘Umar’s decision. Despite the presumption that the use of force to expel those Najrānite Jews and Christians would have been the chosen option in the case of their refusal to abandon Najrān, it is significant that neither Muslim nor Christian sources record any violent actions being taken against them nor consequent sectarian conflicts arising from the implementation of ‘Umar’s decision. This most probably means that the expelled Najrānite Jews and Christians accepted this decision peacefully, rather than committing any violent protests against the Muslim authority.

The historian al-Ṭabarī (1987) related important accounts about the process of expelling those Najrānite Jews and Christians. Caliph ‘Umar bin al-Khaṭṭāb instructed Ya‘lā bin Umayyah to give them the option to choose the country to which they wished to be expelled (al-Ṭabarī, 1987). Caliph ‘Umar bin al-Khaṭṭāb himself wrote an official covenant to those expelled Najrānite Jews and Christians which contains explicit recommendations to the governors of Mesopotamia and Syria (see Appendix 1: Document 6) (al-Shaybānī, 1975, Ibn-Sallām, 1975, al-Balādhurī, 1987, Ibn-Zanjawayh, 2006). The main ones were: giving them the option to choose the country they wished to settle in; exemption from paying *Jizyah* for two years; and granting them free properties and enjoyment of the same terms of protection as under Muslim rule.

According to the previous accounts, the evacuation of Najrānite Jews and Christians from Najrān seems to have taken place peacefully. This may have been due to the instructions of Caliph ‘Umar bin al-Khaṭṭāb’s covenant, which promised some advantages; mainly the exemption from *Jizyah* for two years, and free properties.

Besides this, the movement of large numbers of Arab tribes emigrating to Mesopotamia, Syria, Egypt and other countries with the movement of the Muslim conquests in the early decades of Islam probably represented a motivational factor to those Najrānite Jews and Christians to accept the Caliph decree. The city of al-Kūfa had already been established by the order of Caliph ‘Umar bin al-Khaṭṭāb’s, with the aim of becoming a political and economic centre of the Muslim state in

Mesopotamia (al-Balādhurī, 1987, al-Ṭabarī, 1987). Thus, it would seem that the evacuation of a number of Christians and Jews to a town near this city may have had economic advantages.

The implementation of 'Umar's decision seemingly did not lead to violent actions or destabilisation of the region's coexistence. The available Muslim and Christian sources do not talk about sectarian conflicts or serious incidents during the reign of the two Caliphs 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān and 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib. It seems likely that the impact of 'Umar's decision on the religious and economic conditions in the region was a significant one. The religious character of the Najrān region was affected by the expulsion of a significant number of Jews and Christians. The Christian community became a minority of the population of the region, unlike in the pre-Islamic era, and consequently the decision greatly enhanced the status of Islam as the religion of the majority of the population across the region. However, those Christians and Jews who remained after the expulsion of their co-religionists logically still enjoyed the same protection of religious freedom, person and property as before, as long as they abided by the rules of the Muslim authorities.

These authorities created a new system for the agricultural lands abandoned by the expelled Christians and Jews. This system distributed those agricultural lands to the remaining people of the region, whether Muslim or non-Muslim, in return for the payment of *Kharāj* (land tax) (Abū-Yūsuf, 1962). The aim of this new system was probably to maintain the agricultural output of the region by reclaiming this land, while also providing new opportunities for the remaining people.

In short, the Muslim policy established by the Prophet Muḥammad created a state of peaceful coexistence by accepting non-Muslims as a part of the multi-religious society of Najrān. This acceptance, however, was conditional, because it was based on fixed rules of the Muslim policy not being broken by non-Muslims. The two incidents previously discussed clearly show the serious impact of the rules of this policy on the existence of non-Muslims in the Najrān region. The support provided by non-Muslims to the Muslim authorities in the Wars of the *Riddah* led to the improvement of their situation, whereas the practice of usury led to the expulsion of a number of them. This most probably reflects the real application of the clauses of the Prophet's established policy, rather than a major change in this policy. The partial expulsion did not appear to affect the stability and coexistence amongst the Najrānite multi-religious society for the remainder of the time of the Rashidun Caliphate. However, it had a real impact on the religious structure when Muslims become the majority while Jews and Christians became minority groups.

## 6.6 Conclusion

There appears to be significant evidence of early connections between the Prophet Muḥammad and the people of Najrān. However, the submission of Najrān did not occur until 9 AH / 630 CE with the encounter between the Prophet Muḥammad and a delegation from the Christian community of Najrān, which resulted in a peaceful covenant. This does not mean these Christians accepted Islam, but they retained their religion on condition they submitted to Muslim rule. The conversion of Najrān to Islam began with the submission of the polytheists of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b tribe to the Muslim state in 10 AH / 631 CE and their subsequent conversion to Islam.

That conversion led to a substantial change in the religious structure of the region, resulting in the sharp decline of polytheism and its replacement with Islam. The propagation of Islam among the people of Najrān was performed through a fixed policy, based on sending missions, constructing mosques and *Katātīb* and the establishment of a scholarly trips among the Muslims of the region.

The Muslim authorities clearly adopted a fair tolerant policy toward the Jews and Christians of the region. They offered conditional acceptance of non-Muslims based on respecting the clauses of the covenant with the Muslim authorities, as stated in the three documents drawn up by the Prophet Muḥammad and Caliph Abū-bakr al-Ṣiddīq. This established peaceful coexistence in Najrān as a multi-religious society. However, the existence of Christians and Jews in the region was seriously impacted by the expulsion of a significant number of them to Mesopotamia in the reign of Caliph ‘Umar bin al-Khaṭṭāb. This resulted in another significant change in the religious character of Najrān, establishing Muslims as the majority of the population in the region.

## Conclusion

### 7.1 Findings

The main aim of the present thesis was to examine the religious structure of the region of Najrān during the period following the end of the Ḥimyar kingdom, around 525 CE, until the end of the fourth decade after the advent of Islam. It has sought to answer three essential questions: what was the religious structure of Najrān during the period under study and how did different religious communities lead their religious lives, and how did Islam influence the existence of these religious communities? The research considered the hypothesis that Najrān represented a multi-religious society during the period lasted between the fall of Ḥimyar kingdom until the end of the early Islamic era.

Before examining the research questions, the thesis provided an overview of the relevant literature and presented background information on the geography, history and economy of Najrān. It concluded that most previous research has focused primarily on examining political, economic and literary topics in the history of Najrān. For questions regarding the current study in particular, previous research has also paid little interest to issues of the development of polytheism, Judaism in Najrān, Christian doctrines, places of worship, or Muslim policy towards non-Muslims of the region. This makes the present thesis a new contribution to this research area by focusing on the historical context of the religious development of Najrān's religious communities.

With regard to the background of Najrān, the research has shown that several factors contributed to shape the religious structure of the Najrān region. The geographical location of this region, between the southern, western and central parts of the Arabian Peninsula, gave Najrān its economic importance as an open centre located on the international caravan route. Likewise, the availability of large fertile areas, grazing lands and sources of water were attractive factors for settlement, over a long period of time. Therefore, due to these two economic factors, small groups of Arab tribes such as the Madhḥidj, Ḥimyar, al-Azd, Kinda, Hamdān, Qhuḍā'a, Banū Bakr bin Wā'il and Banū Iyād formed the city of Najrān and the agricultural villages on both sides of the Najrān valley. The Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka'b tribe formed the largest single group in the region's population. The majority of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka'b lived by roaming across the grazing districts of the region as Bedouins, while a smaller number settled in rural areas around the Najrān valley and in the city of Najrān itself.



This varied population adopted different religions during the period under study. It is likely that the majority of Najrānite people who lived in the city and the Najrān valley's villages converted to Christianity, whereas a minority were Jews, in addition to a small number of Zoroastrians. Meanwhile, most Bedouins of Najrān, who were mainly from the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka'b tribe, adopted polytheism, especially the worship of idols.

The economic importance of the city of Najrān as a central marketplace played a significant role in the development of the religious makeup of Najrān's population as a multi-religious society, especially in rural areas and the city centre. This importance is suggested by the number of Christians and Jews in the region who worked in industrial, agricultural and commercial activities. In this respect, this thesis proposes that commercial connections between ancient South Arabia and Palestine were perhaps a result of the existence of a small Jewish community in Najrān, probably from the tenth century BCE onwards. In addition, the research concludes that the economic factors were clearly part of the reason for the arrival of Christianity in Najrān, due to the commercial relationship between Najrān and the states of the Fertile Crescent, as the two Nestorian Christian and Muslim accounts have shown. Moreover, Najrān's economic prosperity is considered to be largely responsible for the existence of non-Arab communities across the region. Specifically, there were a number of Jewish bankers and traders with established financial and commercial practices, and also a settled group of Zoroastrians who specifically worked in mineral extraction.

However, this economic importance brought Najrān to the attention of local, regional and international powers in the region. Najrān was therefore under the continuous threat of conflicts between ancient Arabian kingdoms, between the Ḥimyarite kingdom and Abyssinia, or later between the two great powers of the Byzantine Empire and the Sasanian Persian Empire. One of the main factors behind the interest of these powers was the commercial significance of Najrān as a main centre on the caravan routes, which were often vital for these countries' economies, as they enabled extremely valuable spices and incense to be brought from the East. Here, political factors seem to have been very important in formulating the religious map of parts of the region.

The thesis concludes that the adoption of Judaism as the state religion in the reign of the Ḥimyarite king Tubb' Abū Kariba As'ad possibly enhanced the position of the Jewish community in Najrān, which was part of the Ḥimyarite kingdom during this period. The Ḥimyarite-Abyssinian conflict seriously affected the religious situation in Najrān during the first quarter of the sixth century CE. The Ḥimyarite Jewish king Dhū Nuwās took advantage of the Jewish-Christian conflict in the

region to try to reshape its religious makeup, by persecuting the Christian community and forcing its members to convert to Judaism around 518 CE. This resulted in an Abyssinian military intervention, ending with the fall of the Ḥimyarite kingdom, and most regions in southern Arabian, including Najrān, falling under Abyssinian influence. This new political situation clearly reinforced the primacy of Christianity over Judaism in Najrān, as recorded in the restoration of churches and the appointment of new clergy by the Abyssinian authorities. The Abyssinian efforts, however, most probably did not influence the people who lived across the Bedouin districts, because most of these remained polytheists. This may be due to the concentration of the Christian community in the city and nearby rural areas, due to the political and commercial importance of the city.

During the Persian occupation of South Arabia, it is likely that the Najrān region enjoyed more independence, with the emergence of the political power of the two main groups in the region: the polytheists of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b tribe and the leadership of the Christian community. The establishment of a political and military alliance between these two local powers enhanced the stability of the region, and hence the region’s society became more multi-religious, containing Christians, Jews, polytheists and Zoroastrians. A significant question to ask here is, why did Najrān enjoy political stability and relative religious tolerance under the rule of these two powers, unlike in the Ḥimyarite period when the persecution of the Christian community occurred? The logical answer is that when Najrān was ruled by an alliance of the two largest religious groups, an acceptance of each other’s religious beliefs, and those of other minorities, made for a peaceful coexistence.

The discussion of the main religions in the Najrān region, which included polytheism, Judaism, Christianity and later Islam, has concentrated on the question of how each religion contributed to the religious makeup of the region’s population, considering chronological order when dealing with these religions.

Therefore, the thesis began by evaluating the development of polytheism in Najrān. It concluded that polytheistic faiths evidently seem to have been the oldest in the region of Najrān, as archaeological discoveries confirm, in contrast to the traditional Muslim version which attributed the introduction of polytheism to the tribal chieftain ‘Amr ibn Luḥaī al-Khuzā‘ī as recently around the fourth century CE. Significantly, polytheism in Najrān developed from worshipping the Holy Planetary Trinity of Sun, Moon and Venus to worshipping two types of idol: gods and goddesses. The worship of such idols seems to have been the most common type of polytheism among the

polytheists of Najrān during the period under study, as well as the veneration of trees, animals, jinn, stones and stars. The worship of several idols, including Yaghūth, Wadd, al-‘Uzzā and al-Lāt, probably took place at the same time, contrary to Sammār (1994) supposition of the worship of only the god Yaghūth. The worship and veneration of some trees, animals and even stars does not reflect the full concept of Totemism that Smith (1907) defined. This research has pointed out that the most important requirement of Totemism is the consideration of such objects or creatures as ancestors, which did not occur in this case.

In addition, the thesis deduces that the worship rituals of Najrānite polytheists, such as presenting sacrifices, burning incense, reciting invocations and going on pilgrimage to their idols, do not seemingly reflect Abrahamic features, as Sayuti (1999) suggested. Such rituals perhaps originated with the development of polytheistic faiths, rather than being from Abrahamic origins. Sayuti’s hypothesis can be noticed only in two main rituals: prayer and the Ḥajj to Mecca.

The practice of forms of prayer was significant among the polytheists of Najrān, as can be seen in their praying to their idols or performing special prayers, such as the starting prayer of Ḥajj (performed at the shrine of the god Yaghūth), prayers to idols, and the funeral prayer for their dead. Some of these prayers, in particular the Ḥajj prayer and the funeral prayer, have their roots in the ancient religion of Abraham.

The Ḥajj to Mecca was widely practised among Najrānite polytheists, as can be seen in the adoption of the cult of *al-Ṭuls* by most of them, while some Najrānite polytheists joined the *al-Ḥums* cult due to their relationships with the Meccan people. It also can be assumed in their performing more than one Ḥajj invocation during the days of Ḥajj. Furthermore, the present thesis concludes that the Ḥajj to Mecca perhaps influenced polytheism in Najrān by transmitting the worship of idols from al-Ḥijāz, mainly Wadd, al-‘Uzzā and al-Lāt.

This brings us to consider a general definition of polytheism in Najrān in light of the definition of Arabian polytheism propounded by Dughaym (1995), Hawting (1999), Hoyland (2001) and Mir (2014). This definition reflects how Najrānite polytheists practised their religious life in terms of types of deity, theological beliefs and rituals of worship. Polytheism here is based on the worship of different types of deity, alongside Allah, who the Najrānite polytheists believed is the highest God. This can be seen, for example, in the case of Yaghūth and al-‘Uzzā, who were clearly seen as intercessors with Allah. Importantly, this concept of Allah was common for Najrānite polytheists because it was part of the concept of worshipping idols, before the arrival of Judaism or

Christianity. Thus, the definition of polytheism in Najrān evidently disagrees with the supposition of Dā'ūd (1988) of a probable Christian-Jewish impact.

For Judaism, the thesis suggests that although there is no approximate date for its arrival in Najrān, Judaism probably had some influence in Najrān several centuries before the birth of Christ. This suggestion is based on the commercial ties between South Arabia and Jewish communities in ancient Palestine, and the increasing importance of Najrān itself as an open market on the caravan route. The existence of Judaism in Najrān, however, remained unclear, as in other southern Arabian regions, until the beginning of the fifth century CE, when the Ḥimyarite King Tubb' Abū Kariba As'ad adopted Judaism as the state religion. This decision contributed to the spread of the Jewish faith amongst the Najrānite people, especially the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka'b tribe, although this spread may have been limited, because there was probably little Jewish missionary activity in Najrān, unlike in other southern Arabian regions, where the presence of Judaism was significant.

Significantly, the present thesis deduces that the conditions of the Jewish community in Najrān were impacted by two main factors: the political conditions in the Najrān region and those of South Arabia in general, and second, the community's relationship with the Jews of al-Ḥijāz, the Jewish community of Tiberias in Palestine and Jews in neighbouring southern Arabian regions. More specifically, although some rabbis from Yathrib in al-Ḥijāz played an important role in establishing the Jewish community in Najrān in the reign of King Tubb' Abū Kariba As'ad, the influence of Palestinian rabbis in leading the Najrānite Jewish community appears to have been stronger, especially during the first decades of the sixth century.

Politically, the domination of the Ḥimyarite kingdom over Najrān reasonably supported the existence of Judaism in the region, because it was the state religion, as stated above. This Jewish community, however, remained a minority in comparison to Christianity, which spread significantly through the Najrānite people. The thesis presumes that the invasion of Najrān by the Ḥimyarite Jewish King Dhū Nuwās reflects an attempt to change the religious map in favour of the Jewish faith. This can be seen in the numbers of Najrānite Christians being forced to embrace Judaism and the murder of a large number of those who refused to reject their Christianity, and on these facts both Christian and Muslim sources largely agree. Of course, the consequence was that the Jewish community in Najrān lost its political influence with the fall of the Ḥimyarite Jewish kingdom and Najrān came under Abyssinian influence.

As a result, Judaism could not gain more converts and its followers remained a small community during the period under discussion. In other words, the Abyssinian Christian invasion represented a serious challenge to Jewish existence in Najrān, because of the Abyssinian' vengeful actions against some southern Arabian Jews, as Christian sources record. The Jewish community, however, retained its existence as a small part of Najrānite society during this difficult period. Later, during the Persian occupation, the conditions of the Jews of Najrān somewhat improved, probably because of the decline of Abyssinian Christian influence over Najrān. As a result, the region enjoyed more political independence under local rule, which offered a greater acceptance of the Jewish community, as mentioned earlier. The coming of Islam impacted the Jewish community as it did other religions, as will be detailed in the following paragraphs.

As mentioned above, although some rabbis from Yathrib in al-Ḥijāz played an important role in establishing the Jewish community in Najrān in the reign of King Tubb' Abū Kariba As'ad, the influence of Palestinian rabbis in leading the Najrānite Jewish community appears to have been stronger, especially during the first decades of the sixth century. Little information is available on how Palestinian Jewish missions established the main features of worship by bringing holy books, establishing synagogues and leading worship during the reign of the Ḥimyarite Jewish King Dhū Nuwās. In addition, the role of these missions is mentioned in the transmission of two schools of religious thought, Pharisees and Sadducees, to the Jews of Najrān. Although the date of these Jewish missions preceded the period under study by a few years, they are likely to have played an effective role in shaping the religious identity of the Jewish community in the region during the later period studied in this thesis. This can be presumed by the religious organisation of the religious leadership of Judaism, whose members were known by the term *Aḥbār*, and who consisted of two major classes: jurists and scholars.

There is little available information on the rituals of worship for the Najrānite Jewish community. Some accounts given by Muslim sources indicate the practice of some rituals among the Jews of Yathrib and Yemen in the Prophetic period, such as fasting on the Day of Ashura, the performance of different types of prayer, the practice of circumcision and holding Jewish religious events. Although these sources do not provide direct information for the practice of such rituals among Najrānite Jews, it is likely that they did not differ from their co-religionists either in South Arabia or in al-Ḥijāz in the performance of such forms of worship ritual.

The discussion on Christianity shows the significant development of the religion in the region. Although there appear to have been early attempts to preach Christianity in Najrān, the real formation of the Christian community was probably during the first half of the fifth century CE. Here, the economic factor appears to have played a significant role in the spread of Christianity in Najrān, because of the commercial ties between Najrān and Christian centres in Syria and Mesopotamia, as detailed in the story of the Najrānite trader Ḥayyān, who brought Christianity from al-Ḥīra, or the Syrian ascetic Faymiyūn, who came to Najrān with traders.

There are several interesting aspects of Christian religious life. With regard to places of worship, the research concludes that references to the Ka'ba of Najrān as a large church are evidently based on many Muslim sources misunderstanding the original account. More specifically, as ibn al-Kalbī concluded, the early descriptions of this place in the pre-Islamic poets' accounts do not refer to it as a Christian place of worship. Also, the claim that this Ka'ba was owned by the polytheistic house of Banū ad-Dayyān supports the suggestion that it was just a meeting place for social events. This thesis suggests that there is apparent confusion among later Muslim sources in distinguishing between the Ka'ba of Najrān and the holy church of Najrān.

The Najrānite Christians were not very different from other Eastern Christian communities in their places of worship in terms of types, terms and purposes. They knew three types of place of worship: churches, monasteries and hermitages. The difference between the three types is due to location, size and purpose. Churches were usually located in the city centre, villages and populated areas, whereas monasteries and hermitages were commonly found in areas that are far from population centres. More significantly, churches were used for regular rituals of worship such as prayer, baptism and religious celebrations. Meanwhile, monasteries and hermitages were occupied by those who dedicated themselves to a monastic life.

The development of the theological doctrines of Najrānite Christians is a source of argument in modern research because it was subject to significant changes during the time under study. The thesis partly agrees with recent research in considering Monophysitism as the most common doctrine among the Najrānite Christians from the early sixth century CE. However, Monophysitism itself underwent a serious split that resulted in dividing its followers into Jacobites and Julianites around 525 CE. What is more, Nestorianism and Melchitism also had followers in Najrān at the eve of Islam. Here, political and economic factors clearly played an important role in shaping the doctrinal identity of the Christians of Najrān. The political factor can be seen in Abyssinian efforts

to adopt Monophysitism as the official doctrine of the Najrānite church after their invasion. With regard to economics, the arrival of Nestorianism in Najrān was perhaps due to commercial ties between Najrān and al-Ḥīra in Mesopotamia, where the influence of Nestorianism was strong. Meanwhile, the presence of Melchitism, the official doctrine of the Byzantine Church, among Najrānite Christians in the late pre-Islamic and early Islamic periods was perhaps due to Byzantine aspirations towards building relationships with the Christians of Najrān to counteract the Persian occupation of South Arabia.

This doctrinal pluralism among the Christians of Najrān was evidently reflected in two main aspects of the Christians religious life: theological concepts and clergy. With regard to theological concepts, the understanding of the Christology of Jesus shows how the Christians of Najrān disagreed among themselves. More clearly, Monophysites adopted the one divine nature of Jesus Christ, whereas Nestorians believed that Christ has two separate natures: divine and human. In addition, the Melchite sect appears to have adopted the Chalcedonian formulation of Christ as the union of both human and divine natures in one body. Furthermore, the Christians of Najrān expressed other theological concepts such as Prophethood, Paradise, Hellfire and creation. These issues seem not have been as contentious as the nature of Jesus Christ.

With regard to the clergy, modern research has paid considerable attention to this issue, due to the confusion of its terms, roles and tasks. This confusion is likely to have been based on Ibn-Hishām's statement concerning the three leaders of the Najrānite Christian delegation to Medina, al-Sayyid, al-ʿĀqib and the bishop. The present thesis traces the development of the clergy since the consecration of the first bishop in the region, Paul I, and reaches significant conclusions. The Najrānite clergy developed over the period under research and gained greater autonomy. In other words, although the early clergy of Najrān appeared to have a Monophysitic identity, it is probable that Nestorian and Melchite clergy existed too. Also, the consideration of local terms such as al-Sayyid, al-ʿĀqib and *Wāqif* as members of the clergy involves a misunderstanding. An examination of the responsibilities of these roles shows that the two leaders, al-Sayyid and al-ʿĀqib, clearly represented political positions rather than spiritual leadership. The term *Wāqif* is most probably another local term for the role of deacon. In total, the Najrānite clergy most likely comprised three main classes: bishop, priest and deacon.

The discussion on the rituals of worship provides significant conclusions regarding how the Christians of Najrān worshipped, even though there is little information available. The current

thesis deduces that baptism seems to have been a common ritual, especially for those who were new converts to Christianity. Churches were considered as places to perform baptism as a religious ceremony. The practice of prayer was a basic ritual of worship among the Christians of Najrān, as can be seen in the performance of three types of prayer: daily prayer, a weekly Sunday prayer and special prayers for religious celebrations. The pilgrimage was an important part of their rituals of worship, as can be assumed from its two types: one type was the holy church of Najrān as an object of pilgrimage in memory of martyred Najrānite Christians, and the second was the journeys of Christian pilgrims to Christian shrines in Syria and Mesopotamia.

Monastic life represented a flourishing religious practice among the Christians of Najrān, as can be seen in the increasing number of hermitages and monasteries across the region's districts. This may be due to the stable situation of Najrān's Christians after the Abyssinian invasion of Najrān. The available details tell that clerics accounted for most of the people who practised monasticism, which may be due to its demanding nature, which included living alone, being isolated from people, refraining from eating meat and spending most nights in prayer and reciting the Gospel.

The final chapter discussed religious structure in the region during the first four decades of Islam. The current thesis considers the early connections between the Prophet Muḥammad and Najrānites, both Christians and polytheists. These connections, however, did not lead to an immediate impact of Islam on Najrān. The dominion of Islam in Najrān most likely began in 9 AH / 630 CE when the Christian community submitted to Muslim rule, in return for preserving their religion, as detailed in the Prophet's two covenants to them. Complete dominion, however, occurred in the next year, 10 AH / 631 CE, when the polytheists of the Banū al-Ḥārith bin Ka'b tribe accepted Islam and became a part of Muslim society.

The arrival of Islam in Najrān led to major changes in the religious structure of the region, represented by the decline of polytheism and the growth of Islam to quickly emerge as the strongest religion in Najrān. This affected the status of Christians, Jews and Zoroastrians, some of whom converted to Islam. The conversion of many Najrānites to Islam within a short time brings into focus the policy of Muslim authorities towards spreading the new religion among the Najrānite people. Three approaches were adopted from the time of the Prophet Muḥammad: sending missions, building mosques and *Katātīb*, and supporting scholarly trips. These three steps contributed to gaining more converts to Islam and establishing a new generation of scholars in Najrān itself later in the Rashidun Caliphate era.



The policy of Muslim rule toward those who retained their faiths, primarily Christians and Jews, is interesting for several Western scholars. More clearly, the Western hypothesis of the policy of Muslim rule toward non-Muslims of Najrān as conditional acceptance, offering them second-class citizenship, is re-examined here in the light of citizenship rights and obligations. The thesis concludes that the *Jizyah* represented a financial obligation like *Zakāh*, rather than an additional requirement. The author has presumed that the non-Muslims of Najrān enjoyed important exemptions from military service and *Zakāh*, which had to be fulfilled by Muslims only.

What is more important, the *Jizyah* appears to be the price of the rights of citizenship privileges, rather than derogating non-Muslims' rights. In other words, the Prophet Muḥammad's documents provide detailed information on how Muslim authorities adopted a comprehensive system toward non-Muslims of Najrān in terms of their religion, security and economy. The term "full protection" is not only limited to an individual person; it explicitly includes the freedom of practising religion, the safety of property and the right to practise economic activities. In Muslim law, these are basically parts of the Muslim government's responsibilities towards its citizens regardless of their faith.

The Prophet Muḥammad adopted a fixed policy that offered conditional acceptance to the non-Muslims of Najrān. This policy clearly established a state of peaceful coexistence by giving those non-Muslims freedom of religion and physical protection. As a result, Najrān maintained its religious identity as a multi-religious society, containing Jews, Christians, Zoroastrians and Muslims. The structure of the Najrānite multi-religious society, however, was later influenced by the expulsion of an unknown number of Jews and Christians from the Najrān region. The main reason behind this expulsion does not seem to have been due to the Muslim rulers breaking the terms of the covenant, but the practice of usury by non-Muslims, which was forbidden by the Prophetic covenants. The present study concludes that this expulsion resulted in a major change in the religious structure of Najrān by making Muslims the majority, while Christians and Jews became religious minorities.

It is clear from the whole thesis that the use of the military option in imposing a religion, or obliterating another religion, cannot result in a peaceful and stable multi-religious society. The Jewish-Christian conflict provides evidence of how the attempt to impose Judaism on the Christians of Najrān ended in failure. Meanwhile, the policy of Islam was clearly successful both in propagating Islam and in establishing a stable and peaceful society. This was because Muslim

authorities did not force the followers of Judaism or Christianity to embrace Islam. It is true that there were rules regulating the existence of both communities in the Najrān region, which led to mass expulsions, but these rules seem to have been political and economic, rather than related to the practice of religion.

Overall, Najrān represented a multi-religious society during the period between 525 and 661 CE, consisting of polytheists, Jews, Christians, Zoroastrians and Muslims. Each of these groups had their own aspects of religious life, such as beliefs, rituals, clerics and places of worship. This multi-religious society was impacted by the domination of Islam, which resulted in Islam becoming the religion of the majority.

## **7.2 Recommendations**

The author would make the following recommendations as interesting topics of future research.

The development of southern Arabian polytheism from worshipping the Holy Planetary Trinity to the worship of idols provokes interest in the context surrounding this development. It may be interesting to investigate the main reasons behind replacing al-Maqah, Dhū-Samawī and ‘Athtar with Ya‘uq, Nasr and Yaghūth, especially in the two centuries preceding the rise of Islam. This replacement could not have occurred without examining the external impacts and the approximate date of the spread of worship of such idols. As concluded in Chapter Three, the Ḥajj to Mecca reflects a significant impact on religious thought amongst the Najrānite polytheists, which led to the transmission of the worship of several idols into the region. This issue perhaps presents a promising topic: to examine the role of the Ḥajj to Mecca in influencing southern Arabian pilgrims in terms of their deities, rituals and religious thinking.

It is noticeable that most Muslim historians misunderstood the religious context of non-Muslim religions, mainly Judaism and Christianity. This unfamiliarity may not have been fully taken into consideration by some modern scholars who debated important issues concerning Christianity in Najrān, such as theological doctrines, rituals, the Ka‘ba of Najrān, pilgrimage and clergy. This may lead to interest in studying the background of early Muslim historians such as Ibn-Hishām, ibn al-Kalbī and al-Iṣfahānī on their exposure to the religious and theological contexts of Christianity or Judaism.

The three types of sources, Christian, Muslim and inscriptions, present different versions of the character of al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b in terms of his religion, role and position, and his time period. This thesis has pointed out that Christian sources speak of al-Ḥārith bin Ka‘b as Saint Aretha, the leader of the Christian community, whereas Muslim sources give interesting details about this character as a pre-Islamic ancestor of the great tribe of the same name. A comparative examination of this character, using genealogical sources, would provide a more accurate picture of him.

The concept of citizenship in the light of the Prophet Muḥammad’s covenants with non-Muslims across the Arabian Peninsula apparently remains little studied. It is true that the Constitution of Medina has been paid attention due to its significant definition of the term *‘Ummah*, which is likely to have formed the early Muslim definition of citizenship (Denny, 1977, Rubin, 1985, Lecker, 2004, Arjomand, 2009). This attention, however, does not offer sufficient examination of the same issue in the Prophet’s covenants to the non-Muslim communities of Arabia. The study of the concept of citizenship throughout the Prophetic covenants would be useful in understanding how the Prophet treated this issue.

## Appendix 1: Documents of Najrān

Document 1: The Prophet's invitation letter to the Christians of Najrān:

" ..... from Muḥammad, the Prophet, Messenger of God to the bishops of Najrān. In the name of God, I praise to you the Lord of Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob. I invite you all to worship God instead of worshipping His creatures. And I invite you to and take place under the guardianship of God instead of the guardianship of the creatures. And in case you reject my invitation you must pay *Jizyah* and if you do not accept the, I will fight you ".

(al-Ya'qūbī, 1883, vol. 2, p 89, al-Bayhaqī, 1988, vol. 5, p 535)

Document 2: The Prophet's first covenant to the Christians of Najrān:

This is an epistle from Muḥammad, the Prophet, the Messenger of God, to the people of Najrān: My orders will be binding on them relating to all yellow, white and black fruits, and slaves. He showed them kindness and (emitted all this in return for two thousand *Hullah* (Garment) to be judged by their value in ounces (of silver). In every Rajab one thousand *Hullah* will be due and likewise in every Safar one thousand *Hullah* will be due. Every *Hullah* will be accounted for against an ounce (of silver). If the value of the *Hullah* exceeds the *Kharāj* or fall short of it, it will be adjusted. Whatever of coats of mail, horses, camels or any other things is taken from them will be accounted for. The people of Najrān will have to entertain my messengers (when they come to collect taxes) for twenty days or less; and they will not be detained for more than a month. If there be fighting in Yemen they will have to give as loan thirty coats of mail, thirty horses and thirty camels. Whatever coats of mail, horses and camels, are received as loan by my messengers will be under the guarantee of my messengers till they return them. The people of Najrān and their neighbours are under the protection of God and the guarantee of Muḥammad, the Prophet, the Messenger of God, for their persons, religion, land and property, those who are present and absent, and their churches and places of worship (will be safe). No bishop will be removed from his diocese, no monk from his monastery, and no trustee from his trust. What is in their possession, be it little or much, is theirs, provided that it is not the amount of usury or (a claim) for a blood-feud of the days of *al-Jāhiliyyah*.

If any one of them puts forward a claim for his right, he will get justice without oppression; and oppression on the people of Najrān (will not be tolerated). For him who collected usury before, I am not responsible. None of them will be held for the transgressions of others. Whatever is entered in

this document is under the guarantee of God and perpetual guarantee of the Prophet, till God gives His command. They should be sincere and virtuous, not resorting to oppression. Witnessed by Abu Sufyān Ibn Ḥarb, Ghaylān Ibn ‘Amr, Mālīk Ibn ‘Awf al-Nasrī, al-Aqrā‘ Ibn-Ḥābiss, al-Mughirah Ibn Shu‘bah scribed it ”.

(Ibn-Sa‘ad, n.d., vol. 1, p287, Abū-Yūsuf, 1962, p84, Ibn-Sallām, 1975, p244, al-Shaybānī, 1975, p 267, al-Balādhurī, 1978, p72, Ibn-Zanjawayh, 2006, vol. p2, 72).

Document 3: The Prophet’s second covenant to the Christians of Najrān:

“From Muḥammad, the Prophet of God to the bishop Abū al-Ḥārith bin ‘Alqama and the bishops and priests of Najrān and those who follow them and their monks that everything, few or many, their churches, chapels and monasteries will remain in their possession, they will have the protection of God and His Messenger. No bishop will be removed from his episcopate, no monk from his monasticism, no priest from his priesthood and there will not be alteration of their rights or authority and everything they possess as long as they are loyal and perform their obligations, they not being burdened by wrong and not doing wrong. Scribed by Al-Mughirah”.

Citation: (Ibn-Sa‘ad, n.d., vol. 1, vol. 264, al-Bayhaqī, 1988, vol. 5, 391)

Document 4: The latter of Khālīd bin al-Walīd to the Prophet Muḥammad:

: “In the name of God, compassionate, the merciful. To Muḥammad the Prophet, the Messenger of God. From Khālīd bin al-Walīd. Peace be upon you, O the Messenger of God, and God’s mercy and blessings. I praise God unto you, the only God. You sent me to Banū al-Ḥārith bin Kā‘b and ordered me when I came to them not to fight them for three days and to invite them to Islam, and to accept it from them and teach them the institutions of Islam, the book of God, and the Sunnah of His prophet. And if they did not surrender I was to fight them. I duly came to them and invited them to Islam three days as the Messenger ordered me, and I sent riders among them with your message. They have surrendered and have not fought and I am staying among them instructing them in the Messenger’s positive and negative commands and teaching them the institutions of Islam and the prophet’s Sunnah until the Messenger writes to me. Peace upon you” (p 646).

(Ibn-Hishām, 1955, p 646, al-Ṭabarī, 1990, vol. 9, p 83, Transl. Donner).

Document 5: The Prophet Muḥammad's letter to Khālīd bin al-Walīd:

" In the name of God, Compassionate, the Merciful. from Muḥammad, the Prophet, Messenger of God to Khālīd bin al-Walīd: Peace be upon you, I praise God unto you, the only God. I have received your letter which came with your messenger telling me that Banū al-Ḥārith bin Kā'b surrendered before you fought them and responded to your invitation to Islam and pronounced the *Shahāda*, and that God had guided them with His guidance. So promise them good and warn them and come. And let their deputation come with you. Peace upon you".

(p646).

(Ibn-Hishām, 1955, p646, al-Ṭabarī, 1990, vol. 9, p 83, Transl. Donner).

Document 6: The Caliph Abū-bakr al-Ṣiddīq's covenant to the Christians of Najrān:

"in the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate: this is a document from the servant of God, Abū-bakr, successor of the Apostle of God, to the people of Najrān. He affords them protection from his army and himself, and decrees for them the protection of Muḥammad, except that which Muḥammad the Apostle of God has revoked on God's command regarding their lands and the lands of the Arabs, that two religious should not dwell in them. Therefore, he gave them protection for their persons, their communities, the rest of their properties, their dependents, their horses, those absent of them and those present, their bishop and their monks and their churches wherever they might be; and for what their lands possess whether they little or much. They owe what is incumbent upon them; if they pay it, they will not be compelled to emigrate, nor tithed (not be taxed), nor shall a bishop be changed from their bishopric or a monk from his monastic life. He shall fulfil for them everything that the Apostle of God granted them in witting, and everything that is in this document by way of the protection of Muḥammad, the Apostle of God, and the covenant of the Muslims. They owe (the Muslims) advice and righteousness in those just duties that are incumbent upon them. Al-Miswar bin 'Amr and 'Amr, the client of Abū-bakr, were witnesses (to this agreement)" (Abū-Yūsuf, 1962, p 85, al-Shaybānī, 1975, p 267, al-Ṭabarī 1990, Vol. 10, p 163, Transl. Donner).

Document 6: The recommended letter of 'Umar bin al-Khaṭṭāb to Christians and Jews who were expelled from Najrān:

“.....This is what ‘Umar the Commander of the faithful wrote to the people of Najrān. He who goes in exile under the protection of Allah. No Muslim will harm them honouring what the Apostle of Allah and also Abū-bakr had written for them. After that, the *Amirs* (governors) of Syria and the *Amirs* of Mesopotamia should liberally bestow land on those who approach them. If they work on them, they will be free lands (*Ṣadaqah*) for them and their descendants. Nobody is allowed to encroach on their land to oppress them. After that, if there be a Muslim with them he should help them against one who oppresses them. These are the people who are under the guarantee and the *Jizyah* due from them is redeemed for twenty four months after their arrival there. They will not be taxed, except for fiefs on which they work, they will not be oppressed nor treated harshly. ‘Uthmān *ibn* ‘Affān and Mu‘ayqīb Ibn Abī Fātimah were witnesses”.

(Abū-Yūsuf, 1962, p 67, Ibn-Sa‘ad, 1967, vol. 1, p 388, al-Shaybānī, 1975, p 268, Trans. Haq)

Document 7: The Prophet’s covenant to Banū al- Ḍibāb a branch of Banū al-Ḥārith bin Kā‘b:

“... That they would retain Sāriah, its highlands and nobody would dispute with them about it, as long as they would continue to offer prayers, pay *Zakāh*, obey Allah and His Apostle and dissociate themselves from the heathens. Al-Mughirah had scribed it”.

(Ibn-Sa‘ad, 1967, vol. 1, p 316, Trans. Haq)

Document 8: The Prophet’s covenant to Yazīd Ibn al-Ṭufayl al-Ḥārithī:

“.... that the whole of al-Maḍḍah would be his and no one would dispute with him as long as he continued to offer prayers, pay *Zakāh* and fight against the heathens. Juhaym Ibn al-Ṣalt had scribed it”.

(Ibn-Sa‘ad, 1967, vol. 1, p 316, Trans. Haq)

Document 9: The Prophet’s covenant to Banū Qanan Ibn Tha‘labah, a clan of Banū al-Ḥārith:

“.... that they could retain Majs where they would be safe with their persons and properties. Al-Mughirah had scribed it”.

(Ibn-Sa‘ad, 1967, vol. 1, p 317, Trans. Haq)

Document 10: The Prophet's covenant to 'Abd-Yaghūth Ibn Wa'lah al-Hārithī:

".... that he could retain whatever land and other things, i.e. date-palms were in his possession at the time of his embracing Islam, as long as he offered prayers, paid *Zakāh*, and one fifth of the booty (collected) in battles, and that he would not be required to pay '*Ushr* (tithe) nor would he be ejected (from his land), and that those of his tribe who followed him (would be treated likewise). Al-Arqam Ibn Abī al-Arqam al-Makhzūmī scribed it".

(Ibn-Sa'ad, 1967, vol. 1, p 316, Trans. Haq)

Document 11: The Prophet's covenant to Yazīd Ibn al-Muḥajjal al-Ḥārithī:

"....that they (his men) would retain Namirah, its aqueducts and the valley of al-Raḥman in their forest and that he and his heirs would be the chiefs of his tribe, Banū Malik, and that they would not be attacked nor ejected. Al-Mughirah Ibn Shu'bah had scribed it

(Ibn-Sa'ad, 1967, vol. 1, p 317, Trans. Haq)

Document 12: The Prophet's covenant to Dhū al-Ghuṣṣah Qays Ibn al-Ḥūṣayn about his father's children, Banū al-Ḥārith and Banū Nahd:

"...that they had a guarantee from Allah and from His Apostle, and that they would not be ejected nor subjected to the payment of '*Ushr* as long as they offered prayers, paid *Zakāh* and kept themselves away from the polytheists and bore witness to their Islam, but that their properties would be subjected to the payment of the dues of the Muslims..."

(Ibn-Sa'ad, 1967, vol. 1, p 317, Trans. Haq)

Document 13: The Prophet's covenant to Banū Qanan Ibn Yazīd, a branch of the tribe of Banū al-Ḥārith:

"... that they could retain Midhwad and its irrigation system as long as they offered prayers, paid *Zakāh*, and kept themselves away from the polytheists and kept the routes safe and bore witness to their Islam..."

(Ibn-Sa'ad, 1967, vol. 1, p 317, Trans. Haq)



Document 14: The Prophet's covenant to 'Āṣim Ibn al-Ḥārith al-Ḥārithī:

“.... that he would be entitled to the trees of Rākis and no one would question their title. Al-Arqam had scribed it”.

(Ibn-Sa‘ad, 1967, vol. 1, p 317, Trans. Haq)

Document 15: The Prophet's covenant to Banū Ziyād Ibn al-Ḥārith and other persons of the tribe of Banū al-Ḥārith bin Kā‘b:

“..... that they would retain Jammā and Adhnibah and they would be safe there as long as they offered prayers, paid *Zakāh* and fought the heathens. ‘Ali had scribed it”.

(Ibn-Sa‘ad, 1967, vol. 1, p 317, Trans. Haq)

## Appendix 2: Tables

Table 1: The main aspects of the religious life of polytheism

Origins	The worship of Idols		Beliefs		Rituals	
Before 7 <sup>th</sup> BCE	Gods	Goddesses	The belief of Allah as the supreme God		presenting gifts	
			celestial bodies		performing sacrifices	
	al-Madān	al-‘Uzzā	Stars	Planets	burning incense	
			Sirius	Venus	repeating some invocations	
			Pleiades			
	Wadd	Manāt	Trees		Prayer (Ṣalāt)	
			The great palm	Thāt Anwaṭ	Prayer to idols	funeral prayer (Ṣalāt al-Janāzah)
	Yaghūth	al-Lāt				
		Dhū al-Khalaṣa	Animals		divining arrows (al-Azlām)	
			Camel	Sheep	Ḥajj (Pilgrimage)	
			Fox	Horse	The pilgrimage to Mecca	The pilgrimage to idols
			Lion	Snake		
			stones (Ḥejārah)			
			Jinn			

Table 2: The main aspects of the religious life of Judaism

Origins	Religious Organisation		Religious Beliefs	Rituals of Worship	
around the 10 <sup>th</sup> century BCE & 5 <sup>th</sup> CE	Schools of thought		The Prophethood	Fasting	
				Religious celebration	
				Day of Ashura	Saturday
	Pharisees	Sadducees	old prophets	circumcision	
	houses of worship		creation	postponement	
	synagogues	<i>Bayt al-Madāris</i>  The House of Schools	holy books	Prayer	
				The daily prayer (Three times)	Special prayer
					The prayer for rain
	religious leaders				
	rabbis <i>(Aḥbār)</i>	priests <i>(Cohen)</i>			
	Holy books				
	Torah	Talmud			

Table 3: The main aspects of the religious life of Christianity

Origins	Places of Worship	Doctrines		Theological Concepts			Clergy	Rituals of Worship		
5 <sup>th</sup> CE	Church	Monophysitism		the Christology of Jesus Christ			Bishop <i>(Asquff)</i>	Baptism		
	Monastery	Jacobism	Julianism	Prophethood			Priest <i>(Quss)</i>	Prayer		
	Hermitage	Nestorianism		creation			Deacon <i>(Shammās or Wāqīf)</i>	Daily prayer	Sunday prayer	Prayer in religious celebrations
		Melchitism		seas	heaven	Sin		Pilgrimage		
				Paradise				To the church of the Najrānite martyrs		To Christians shrines in Syria and Mesopotamia
				Hellfire				monastic life		

### Appendix 3: Maps

Map 1

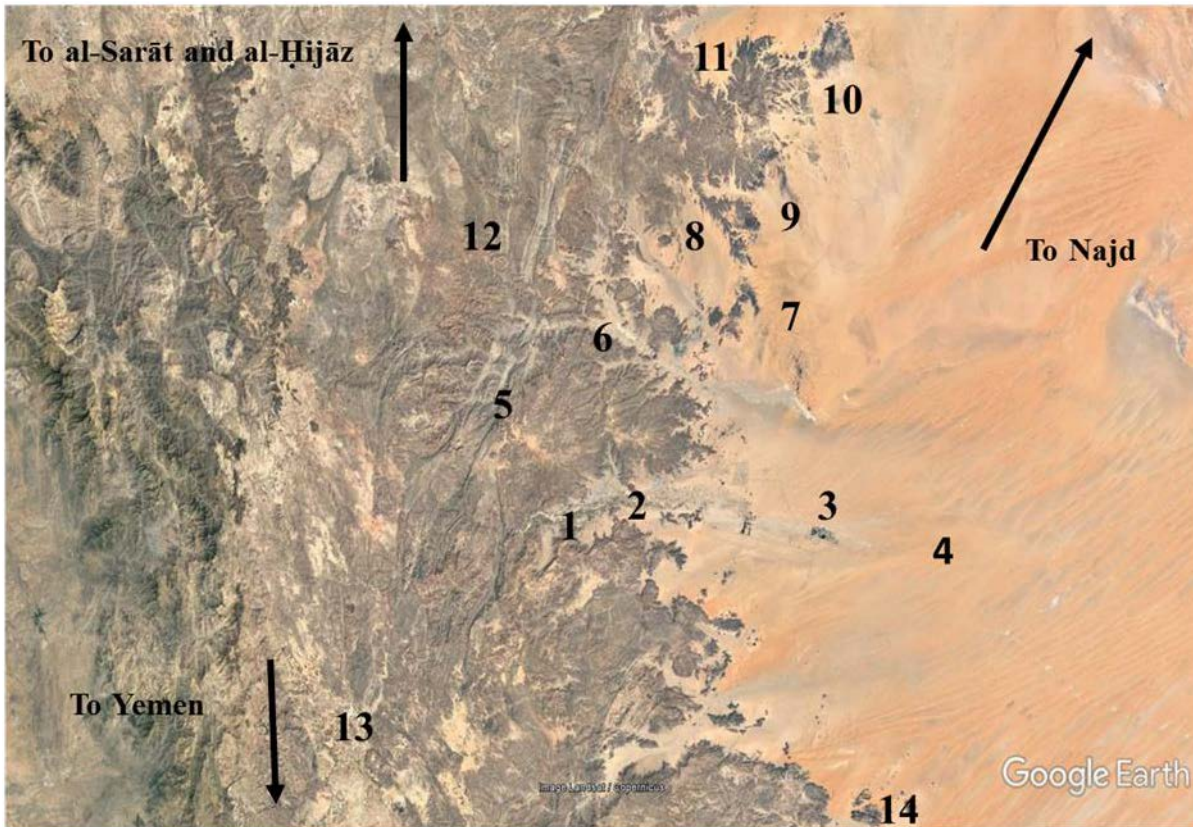
Arabian Peninsula in the pre-Islamic and early Islamic periods



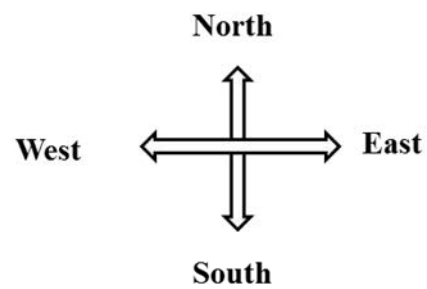
(al-Bakrī, 1983, al-Sharīf, 1984, al-Hamdānī, 1989, al-Murīḥ, 1992, al-Ḥamawī 1995)

## Map 2

### The region of Najrān



- |                 |                        |
|-----------------|------------------------|
| 1. Najrān city  | 2. The Najrān valley   |
| 2. Tāşlāl hills | 4. Remlāl Şayhad       |
| 5. 'Akfah       | 6. Ḥabūnan             |
| 7. Thajr        | 8. Thār                |
| 9. Ābār Ḥemā    | 10. al-Kawkab Mountain |
| 11. Yadamah     | 12. Badr               |
| 13. Şa'adh      | 14. al-Jawf            |



(al-Bakrī, 1983, al-Sharīf, 1984, al-Hamdānī, 1989, al-Murīḥ, 1992, al-Ḥamawī 1995)

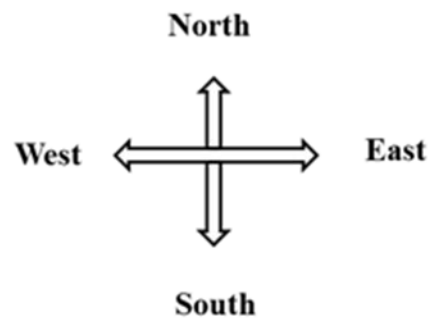


### Map 3

#### The valley of Najrān



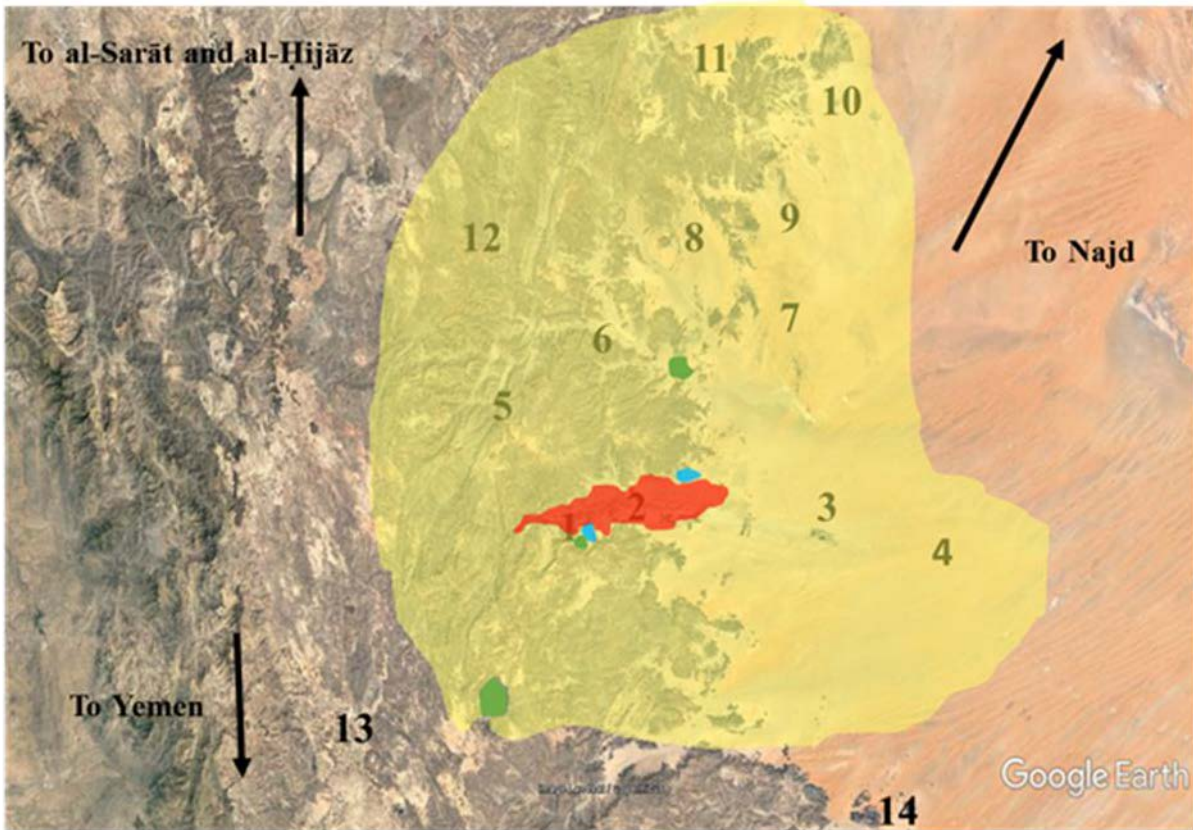
- |                           |                                |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. The Najrān city center | 2. The old al-Hajr (al-Ukhdūd) |
| 3. The new al-Hajr        | 4. al-Qāpil                    |
| 5. Pūles                  | 6. Rijllā                      |
| 7. 'Akmān                 | 8. al-Mūfjah                   |
| 9. al-Ḥuṣun               | 10. al-Ḥaḍan                   |
| 11. Sāghir                | 12. Sūḥān                      |
| 13. Dhaybān               | 14. 'Arāis                     |
| 15. The valley            |                                |



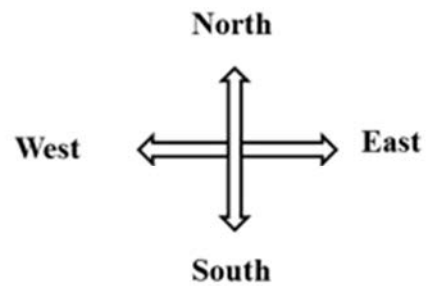
(al-Bakrī, 1983, al-Sharīf, 1984, al-Hamdānī, 1989, al-Murīḥ, 1992, al-Ḥamawī 1995)

# Map 4

The religious structure of Najrān in pre-Islamic period 525- 630 CE



- |                 |                        |
|-----------------|------------------------|
| 1. Najrān city  | 2. The Najrān valley   |
| 2. Taṣlāl hills | 4. Remlāl Ṣayhad       |
| 5. 'Ākfah       | 6. Ḥabūnan             |
| 7. Thajr        | 8. Thār                |
| 9. Ābār Ḥemā    | 10. al-Kawkab Mountain |
| 11. Yadamah     | 12. Badr               |
| 13. Ṣa'adh      | 14. al-Jawf            |



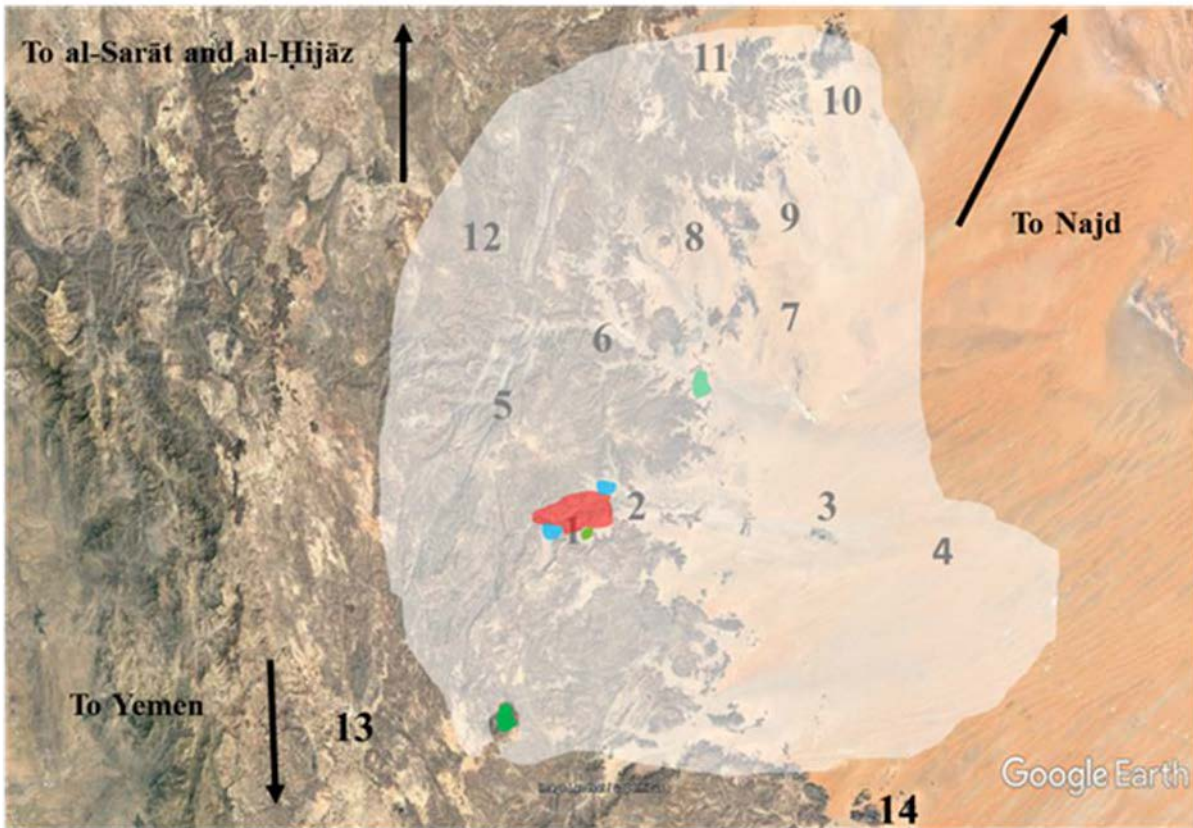
- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <span style="display: inline-block; width: 20px; height: 15px; background-color: yellow; border: 1px solid black;"></span> Polytheists | <span style="display: inline-block; width: 20px; height: 15px; background-color: blue; border: 1px solid black;"></span> Jews          |
| <span style="display: inline-block; width: 20px; height: 15px; background-color: red; border: 1px solid black;"></span> Christians     | <span style="display: inline-block; width: 20px; height: 15px; background-color: green; border: 1px solid black;"></span> Zoroastrians |

(Ibn-Sa'ad, n.d., al-Qālī, 1978, al-Bakrī, 1983, al-Hamdānī, 1989, al-Ḥamawī 1995, al-Iṣfahānī, 1997)

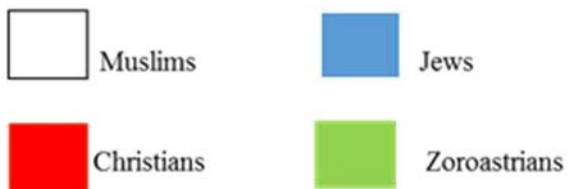
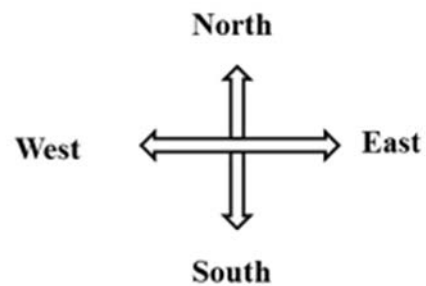


# Map 5

The religious structure of Najrān in Rashidun Caliphate era 632- 661 CE



- |                 |                        |
|-----------------|------------------------|
| 1. Najrān city  | 2. The Najrān valley   |
| 2. Taṣlāl hills | 4. Remlāl Ṣayhad       |
| 5. 'Akfah       | 6. Ḥabūnan             |
| 7. Thajr        | 8. Thār                |
| 9. Ābār Ḥemā    | 10. al-Kawkab Mountain |
| 11. Yadamah     | 12. Badr               |
| 13. Ṣa'adh      | 14. al-Jawf            |



(Ibn-Sa'ad, n.d., al-'Alawī, 1972, Ibn-Ya'qūb, 1996, Ibn al-Mujāwir, 1996, al-Thaqafī, 2002)

#### **Appendix 4: Photos**

Note: All photos herein were taken by the author

Photo 1: The archaeological site of the old city centre, al-Ukhdūd



Photo 2: Another picture of al-Ukhdūd





Photo 3: Remnants of religious building in al-Ukhdūd site which mostly refers to church



Photo 4: Another picture of the religious building



Photo 5: The claimed location of the Ka'ba of Najrān



Photo 6: Another picture close to the location of the Ka'ba of Najrān





Photo 7: The ‘Ākfah site, around 80 km north of Najrān city



Photo 8: Remnants of the Khālīd bin al-Walīd mosque in ‘Ākfah site





Photo 9: inscriptions written by the Kufic script on the niche of mosque



The text of inscription: “Muḥammad bin Abd..... testifies there is no god but Allah in the only God who has no partner and Muhammad is his servant and messenger and the Doms Day is true”.

Reading inscription by al-Murīḥ, Ṣāleḥ

Translated by the author

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